

UNDERSTANDING THE LAW IN ROM. 7:1-6: AN ENTHYMEMIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Rom. 7:1-6 is an important passage for describing the relationship between believers and the law, but contains various hermeneutical problems that cause difficulty in understanding. This article first argues that Paul is speaking to a mixed audience of Roman Christians rather than to purely Jewish or Gentile believers. Secondly, the literary genre of Rom. 7:1-3 is argued as analogy. A seemingly difference between the analogy proper and its conclusion is easily understood when we recognize Paul's worldview, i.e., Paul as a Jew could never conceive of the law of God as being discarded. Furthermore, Earnshaw's interpretation that the analogy must be viewed from the perspective of the two-staged marriage relationship between the believers and Christ is refuted. The view is also put forward that the marriage system Paul employs here comes from his Jewish worldview; thus it does not belong to the wider Greco-Roman system. On the grounds of these considerations I proceed to interpret our text using an enthymemic analysis, an important tool for unravelling Paul's rhetoric in persuading his audience. The law here certainly has a wider concept than the Mosaic Law and the best option is the law of God mentioned in v. 22.

Key Concepts: Romans 7, law, worldview

Both Rom. 7 and the law in Paul's letters are well-known for being difficult to understand. Both have been hotly debated among NT scholars and, until now, no consensus has been reached. In Rom. 7:1-6 we encounter many problems that cause us to stumble. Whom is Paul addressing in Romans 7? Is he speaking purely to Jewish Christians or to Gentile Christians or to a mixed group of Christians? Is Rom. 7:2-3 an allegory, illustration, or analogy? Does Paul lack imagination in his writing? What kind of marriage does Paul describe here: Jewish marriage or Greco-Roman marriage? In this article, the problems mentioned above will be dealt with and this will form an important step toward solving the problem of understanding the law and its relationship to the believers. In this process, an enthymemic analysis will be utilized.

Who Are Paul's Addressees Here?

In the opinion of some scholars Paul is addressing purely Jewish believers here. Paul says in 7:1, Ἡ ἀγνοεῖ ἀδελφοί, γινώσκουσιν γὰρ νόμον λαλῶ ("Do you not know, brothers – for I am speaking to men who know the law"). Here Paul calls them directly, "brothers", so they are certainly believers. Then, he further identifies them as "men who know the law". Who are these believers? Some scholars think that these phrases indicate that Paul is addressing here purely Jewish Christians (Segal 1986:362; Watson 1991:204). One of the main reasons for their conclusion is that they assume that the law being referred to is the

Mosaic Law. However, others think that we cannot be conclusive about this designation, since there is still the problem of determining which kind of law Paul is referring to. Still others think that these phrases can also be applied to Gentiles (Fraikin 1986:93, 96, 103; Vorster 1991:32; Stowers 1994:21-22). For them even if the law refers to the Mosaic Law, it cannot exclude the Gentile believers, because most Gentile believers had a background of being God-fearing, so so they would have been quite familiar with the Mosaic Law. It is hard to determine which understanding is more plausible. The best solution to this problem is to understand both, i.e., the mixed audience. Actually, what Paul says here is understandable to any ethnic people as Fitzmyer rightly suggests (1993:457). So we cannot limit the designation to either the Jewish or the Gentile Christians. This understanding is quite fitting if we think about the law Paul mentions in v. 1. It is true that the identity of the audience partly depends on which kind of law Paul is referring to. This is so complex that it cannot be solved easily. We will come to that problem as we proceed further. There have been various suggestions, but as I evaluate all the different interpretations the best understanding of the law in Paul's writings is to view the "law" as *God's law in general including the Mosaic Law and the law written in the heart* shown in its immediate co-text (7:22) and Rom. 2. What Paul is doing in Rom. 7:1 is to lay down a general principle of the law, which can apply to any society (Mounce 1995:160). In this sense, what Paul says here can be taken as a "maxim" (Barclay 1958:94; Tannehill 1967:44; Robinson 1979:77) or "principle" (Cranfield 1982:334-35; Mounce 1995:160) based on God's law. As we will see later from a study of his method of argumentation, Paul argues from general to specific or concrete in this passage. If we view the law in this context, then, the identity of Paul's addressees is likely to be a mixed congregation, both Jewish and Gentile believers, in contrast to the view of others who think that the audience in Romans consists of either only Gentiles or Jewish Christians.

Is Rom. 7:2-3 an Allegory, Illustration, or Analogy?

At this stage we need to decide what kind of literature Romans 7:2-3 is: is it an allegory, an analogy, or an illustration? How should this pericope be classified? Previously, this passage has been dealt with basically in one of these three ways. It was treated as an *allegory* by the early Church Fathers. For example, Augustine interpreted the wife as symbolic of the soul, the husband as corrupt human nature; Origen regarded the wife as the church and the husband as the law; other patristic writers considered the wife as the soul and husband as the law (cf. O'Neill 1975:122; Little 1984:86). This allegorical approach is still used by modern commentators: O'Neill (1975:122) interprets the wife as the believer and the husband as the body; Gale (1964:195) sees the wife as symbolic of the new self, the husband of the old; lastly, Sanday and Headlam (1896:172-174), and MacLeod (1994:116 n.22) interpret that (1) the wife represents our inmost self, or personality; (2) the first husband is our "old man" or former self under the law; (3) the death of the first husband represents the crucifixion of our "old man" with Christ; (4) the law is the Mosaic law; and (5) the new husband is Jesus Christ. Cranfield and Martin correctly reject the view that this pericope is an allegory (Cranfield 1982:334, 335; Martin 1989:110 n.3). If it were an allegory, Paul would provide an explanation of it as he did in Galatians with the two types of Jerusalem and Hagar and Sarah. But Paul does not give any clue here to assist in interpreting the text as an allegory. Similarly, Martin comments that there is no indication given in the text to interpret it allegorically (1989:110 n.3).

The second approach is to treat the pericope strictly as an *analogy* and to examine how its features correlate to the statements between the analogy proper in vv.2-3 and the

conclusion in v. 4. Commonly, there has been agreement on at least three points of correspondence: 1) the wife is seen to correspond to the believer; 2) the first husband is seen to correspond to the law; 3) the second husband is seen to correspond to Christ. In this interpretation, the wife's first marriage is perceived as representing the believer's former subjection to God's law, while her second marriage is perceived as representing the believer's union with Christ (see Little 1984:85-87; Martin 1989:110).

However, when the analogy is seen in this way, a serious difficulty is encountered: why does the analogy proper of the one who dies not match the conclusion? It is noted that in the conclusion the one who dies is the believer, while in the analogy proper it is not the wife (as one normally would expect, since she corresponds to the believer) but the husband. Because of this discrepancy some scholars criticize Paul for his lack of imagination, and for contradiction and inconsistency. (Dodd 1932:101, 103; Derrett 1970:462; Robinson 1979:77; Räisänen 1987:46, 62 n.93; Dahl 1977:83).

In my opinion it is quite understandable that Paul formulates the passage in this way. For him the law of God is basically the divine will of God for the people of God, not only in OT times but also in NT times. The law is a reflection of God's character, so the law cannot and never will die. This would be unthinkable to Paul as a Jew. Instead, as Paul correctly says, Christians have died together with Christ Jesus. What he says in v. 1, as a general principle, is true of either one of the married couple, as Earnshaw points out (1994:81).

The third approach to this pericope is to view it as an *illustration* rather than an analogy (Tannehill 1967:44; Cranfield 1982:335; Hendriksen 1980:215). For example, Cranfield states:

[T]he decisive clue to the right interpretation of these verses [vv. 2-3] is the recognition that they were not intended to be connected directly with v.4 but with v.1. They are not an allegory (nor yet a parable) ... but an *illustration* designed to elucidate v.1 ... We take it then that these two verses are simply intended as an *illustration* of the principle stated in the ὅτι-clause of v.1 ..., namely, that the occurrence of a death effects a decisive change in respect of relationship to the law. (Italics mine) (Cranfield 1982:335).

Cranfield doubts that Paul ever really uses these verses as an analogy in the first place. He sees these verses rather as an instance or illustration of the general principle that death does away with legal obligations. He comes to this understanding from the use of ὡστε ("therefore" or "so"). He contends that if Paul had intended these verses as an analogy, he would have used οὕτως ("likewise", "so", "so also") instead (Cranfield 1982:335). Scholars who follow this line of thought do not search in the details of Paul's picture to find one-to-one correspondences, for there would not seem to be a set of correspondences there to begin with.

Hendriksen (1980) also opposes the idea of viewing Rom. 7:2-3 as an analogy. He sees only one point of correspondence: "It is this: as it is a death that dissolves the marriage bond, so it is also a death that dissolves the legal bond; i.e., the bondage to law" (:216).

Earnshaw is another scholar who interprets this saying of Paul as an illustration (1994:68-88). Even though he calls it an analogy, the way he understands these verses is actually as an illustration (see following discussion). At first he lays down some preliminary considerations of why these verses need to be interpreted as analogy and notes the similarity of the underlying structure of thought in Rom. 7:1-4 and 6:1-11. In Rom. 7:1-4 Paul, by means of the marriage analogy, illustrates that "the believer has been delivered from the law and is now alive (to bear fruit, v. 4) to God; *and this transfer has been effected by the believer's participation with Christ in both his death and his resurrection*" (italics

his, :72). From this perspective Earnshaw presents a whole set of correspondences in the marriage analogy:

The marriage law (rather than the first husband) = the Mosaic law; (2) the marriage law's authority over the wife during the first marriage = the Mosaic law's authority over the individual during the old covenant; (3) the marriage law's authority over the husband (the marriage law no more allows him to be an adulterer than it allows the wife to be adulteress) = Mosaic law's authority over Christ (who was 'born under the law', Gal 4.4); (4) the cessation of the marriage law's authority over the wife because of her first husband's death = the cessation of the Mosaic law's authority over the believer because of Christ's death; (5) the deaths of the first husband and of Christ have such liberating results for the wife and for believers respectively because of the two unions involved. That is, the marriage union between the first husband and the wife = the soteriological union between Christ and believers; (6) hence, the first husband = Christ, and the first husband's death, with its liberating effects for the wife = Christ' death, with its liberating effects for the believers; (7) the resulting freedom of the wife from the marriage = the believer's freedom from the Mosaic law; (8) the new marriage union between the wife and the *second* husband = the soteriological union between believers and the now *risen* Christ; (9) thus the second husband = Christ, not as crucified, but in his risen, eschatological mode of existence; and (10) in this way the two husbands = the two successive modes of Christ's incarnate/human existence, viz., Christ's existence under the Mosaic law in the old age culminating in death, followed by his risen, eschatological mode of existence with its accompanying freedom from the Mosaic law (Earnshaw 1994:72-73).

Earnshaw contends that if it is understood that the law of Moses is represented in the analogy by the law of marriage and not by the husband, Paul's analogy will be understood correctly. He demonstrates this interpretation with several points. First, both the Mosaic law and the marriage law are cast in roles of authority. Thus Earnshaw rejects the common understanding that sees the husband as the "real" master over the wife.

Second, in Paul's marriage analogy the Mosaic law and the marriage law are referred to by means of a single term νόμος. Paul makes this term perform "double duty" in order to make the link between the Mosaic law and the marriage law explicit. Paul uses this kind of practice frequently in places involving comparisons or analogies (e.g., Gal. 4:21-31, Jerusalem; Rom. 5, Adam etc.).

Third, Earnshaw says that his understanding is further strengthened by an important construction in which νόμος is used. The expression καταργέω ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου occurs first in v. 2, where the wife is said to be καταργέω + ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου when her first husband dies. In v. 6 Paul uses the expression again to tell his Christian readers: καταργήθημεν ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου. This parallel clearly suggests that "Paul is using the 'law' from which the wife is released to represent the 'law' from which the Christian is released" (1994:80).

Earnshaw's interpretation does make sense in many areas. However, I have some difficulties with his interpretation. First of all, I doubt that his interpretation of Rom. 7:1-6 can be classified as an analogy. He does not provide any definition of an analogy and just assumes that his readers will understand the term in his article. Analogy is an important concept in philosophy and Christian theology for expressing the relationship between man and God (Perelman 1982:114). Usually analogy is defined as the comparison of some relationship to another, a typical case is: *A* is to *B* as *C* to *D*. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) quote an example of analogy from Aristotle: "For as the eyes of bats are to the blaze of day, so is the reason in our soul to the things which are by nature most evident of all" (:373). Both *A* (reason in the soul) and *B* (obviousness) are called the *theme* to which the conclusion relates, and both *C* (eyes of bats) and *D* (blaze of day) are called the *phoros*, that which is used to buttress the argument. In order for an analogy to stand, it is necessary

that the theme and the phoros belong to different realms. If the two relations belong to the same realm, then there is no analogy but an argument by example or illustration, in which the theme and the phoros represent two particular cases of a single rule (1969:373). If this definition is correct, then Earnshaw's interpretation of Rom. 7:1-6 fits an illustration or example, not an analogy (see Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969:357), because he sees the marriage law as corresponding to the Mosaic law. The two types of law obviously belong to the same sphere; the marriage law is just a specific case of the Mosaic Law. But if the first husband is representing the Mosaic law as is commonly held, then Rom. 7:2-3 can be called an analogy, because the items in the relationship belong to different spheres. Earnshaw needs to be careful in his use of the term "analogy" as he interprets Rom. 7:1-6.

Second, Earnshaw rejects the view of the first husband as being in a role of authority over his wife, as some scholars hold (e.g., Dodd 1932:101; Barrett 1962:136; Räisänen 1987; Dunn 1988:136). Instead, he proposes that it is the marriage law that holds that authority (1994:78). It is true that marriage law has authority over people, however, it needs to be borne in mind that it is *the husband* who exercises the marriage law. The latter understanding is better, because a language is a reflection of its culture and society, and what Paul says about marriage here does fit Jewish culture, society and its law, not Greco-Roman culture and its law. For example, under Roman law, a widow was required to mourn and remain unmarried for one year after her husband's death or she would forfeit her inheritance from her husband's estate (Corbett 1969:249-50). Thus Paul's point that death ended the marriage bond does not quite fit with Roman law and culture, also since divorce was so common in the Greco-Roman world at that time. Furthermore, according to Roman law, a marriage could be terminated by the free will of either partner (Carcopino 1940:95-96; Corbett 1969:929; Dunn 1988:360). In Jewish law only the husband had the right of divorce in accordance with Deut. 24:1. In Jewish society the husband was able to hold his wife in subjection by *means* of the marriage law. It is true then that, in the Jewish context, husband and wife were not equal partners, for the man was the woman's master (Tannehill 1967:44). In the light of this consideration there is no reason to reject the first husband as holding the role of authority over his wife.

Third, the most serious weakness of Earnshaw's interpretation is that of making the first husband Christ incarnate. In the text, Paul does not provide any hint that the readers should see a two-staged relationship with Christ. In fact, Paul refers to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ at once in one phrase, "to him who was raised from the dead" (v. 4). At the same time Paul is making a contrast between the former relationship with the law and the present relationship with Christ. If we follow Earnshaw's suggestion, this contrast that Paul is emphasizing will be lost. Theologically, we agree with Earnshaw that, by Christ's death, believers have liberation from the law, but it is impossible to see how Christ Jesus can reign like sin. It is important to note that Paul uses the verb "κυριεύω" in v. 1; this is the verb that Paul uses to describe in Rom. 6 how sin (v. 14) and death (v. 9) reigned over the audience before they were in Christ. There he says that those who have been united to Christ in his death are no longer ruled over (κυριεύω) by death and sin. In 7:1 Paul says that the law reigns over man or has mastery over man as long as man remains alive. This means that the law as master rules over man harshly as sin and death do. If this is correct, how can we say that Christ-incarnate rules over man like sin the master? It is certainly not possible. Here the law is pictured as a master demanding absolute obedience from his slaves. Believers were slaves to the law previously and so they need to have freedom from the bondage of the law. The only way out of that bondage is death; there is no other way except death. Therefore, in v. 4 Paul says that the believers' union with Christ crucified has severed their

bondage to the law. Because of this perspective, Fitzmyer rightly says that death, sin and the law are “the threesome that tyrannize human existence apart from Christ” (1993:457).

So even though Earnshaw tries to solve the confusion why there is difference between the analogy proper and its application by suggesting a two-staged relationship with Christ, his interpretation has some weaknesses as I pointed out above. I think Paul’s expression about marriage in vv. 2-3 is in fact an analogy, with some distinct points of correspondence. The common understanding of the marriage analogy, which I mentioned above, is still valid. The confusion that NT scholars have will be solved when it is remembered that Paul and his audience knew perfectly well the principle of God’s law. The reason why Paul changes the referent is that he could not say that the law had died, because the law has not died. The law is still alive and cannot die. The law is God’s moral law, God’s moral demands upon mankind since creation. The Decalogue is a perfect written summary of this moral law and so it is still binding on Christians as long as they are alive. Christians cannot do away with the law of God, in contrast to the Antinomians. The meaning of “dead to the law” is that our old relationship to the law has ended because of our participation in the death of Jesus Christ (v. 4). Even though the law never intended to bring justification and salvation by deeds to the people (3:20), it is still valid as God’s perfect rule of righteousness for God’s people both in OT times and in NT times. What is meant is that believers are no longer “under” the law as a covenant of works (6:14). We are no longer in the position of trying to save ourselves by keeping the law. It does not mean that we should have no [further] interest at all in the moral law of God and its demands. That is contradictory to biblical teaching, because the whole purpose of salvation is to enable us to keep God’s law. That is one of the blessings of the new covenant (see Jer. 31: 31-33; Heb. 8:8-10; Matt. 5:17-19). Even though we are no longer “under” the law as a means of salvation, we are to keep and practice it in our daily life. This is confirmed in the immediate co-text, especially 8:3, 4. In that passage Paul clearly says that the purpose of salvation is to enable us to carry out the righteousness of the law, which was impossible before. In the same vein, Paul could exhort the Roman Christians to love one another, and the way to show such love was to keep the Decalogue (13:8-10).

Understanding Argumentation and Enthymeme

We understand that rhetoric is not just style and ornament, but argumentation. Paul wrote a letter to the Romans in order to persuade Roman Christians to live harmoniously among Jews and Gentiles in the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In Romans Paul uses “argumentative devices to persuade the readers to think and act in one way rather than another” (Robbins 1996b:21).

Basically, there are two kinds of reasoning: logical or syllogistic, and qualitative. Logical reasoning utilizes assertions, supporting reasons, clarifying through opposites and contrasts, and possibly presenting short or elaborating counterarguments. Qualitative reasoning occurs “when analogies, examples, and citations of ancient testimony function in a persuasive manner” (:21). According to *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (IV.43.56-44.57), there are seven parts of argumentation: thesis, rationale (reason), contrary with rationale (opposite), restatement of thesis with rationale, analogy, example and citation of written testimony of antiquity, and conclusion (cf. :21-22). Usually, the thesis and rationales or reasons occur at the beginning. A thesis and a rationale form two of the three parts of a logical syllogism.

Which kind of reasoning is prominent in Rom. 7:1-6? In this pericope we have an analogy of marriage, which is a case of qualitative reasoning. However, Paul also uses syllogistic reasoning in Rom. 7:1-6. For example, he often uses γὰρ (3 times in 7:1-6, 13

times in Rom. 7 as a whole) and ἐὰν δὲ (3 times in 2 verses, once without δὲ) (see Aristotle *The Art of Rhetoric* I.ii.8-22, ii.22; Robbins 1996a:59). In addition to this, Paul uses some contrasting concepts in Romans 7. In Romans 7:1-6 Paul uses “κυριεύει” and “δέδεται” vs. “κατήργηται” and “ἐλευθέρω”; the words related to “live” and “living” vs. “death” and “die”; the phrase “bear fruit to God” vs. “bear fruit to death”; “we were” (ἡμεν) vs. “now” (νυν); “in newness of the Spirit” vs. “in oldness of the letter”. Furthermore, we have two different marriages: one before being in Christ and one now in which, as a Christian, we are married to Jesus Christ. Thus we may conclude from this survey of data from Rom. 7:1-6 that Paul uses both forms of reasoning almost equally.

Let us now investigate the argumentative flow of thought of Rom. 7:1-6. In so doing we will utilize the argumentative structure and enthymemes of our text. According to Aristotle in his *The Art of Rhetoric*, the enthymeme is the body of persuasion (σῶμα τῆς πίστεως; I.1.3 [1354a]). This means that the enthymeme is the heart of argumentation. Vernon Robbins, in his keynote address at a London conference in 1995, challenges us to study enthymeme in New Testament texts (1997:24-52). The importance of studying enthymeme is that it indicates the social and cultural nature of the reasoning in the text, it becomes “a gateway into early Christianity as a social and cultural movement during the first century” (Robbins 1997:35-36). Robbins has developed the function of enthymemes as an important part of the argumentative texture of a text in *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse* (1996a) and *Exploring the Texture of Texts* (1996b), as well as in some articles which examine enthymemes in specific texts (1998a:191-214 and 1998b:343-366).

At this stage it is necessary to define what the enthymeme is. “The enthymeme is a universal mode of human expression in argumentation” (Eriksson 2000:3). Aristotle defined it as a rhetorical syllogism (*Rhet* I.2.8 [1356b]). There is a difference between a syllogism in logic and in rhetoric: in the former the premises are irrefutable truths, but in the latter the opinions expressed are shared by the audience, called εἰδοξα by Aristotle. This difference is important, as it implies that enthymemes are not limited to the rules of logic, but are arguments in everyday life. One of the features of Aristotle’s enthymeme is that it is not limited to “rational” argumentation; it also includes *ethos* and *pathos* as *topoi* in its construction (Eriksson 2000:2).

Through time the definition of the enthymeme altered. The most common understanding of the enthymeme is “a syllogism with a suppressed premise”, and recently it has been understood as “a syllogism based on probabilities” (Eriksson 2000:2).

Usually, three types of classical logic are recognized: induction, abduction, and deduction. These three logical types have the same constructional elements: rule, case and result. These three terms are used in the approach of Robbins (1997) and Eriksson (2000), both of whom adapted that of Lanigan (1995:49-70). Here the conclusion to the argument is called the “result”, the evidence or a minor premise is called the “case”, and the argumentative link or a major premise is called the “rule”. But the order and the development of the logic in each type are different. The order of induction is case, result, and rule; the order of deduction is rule, case, and then result. Abduction follows a similar order to the deductive order, but the order of case and result is reversed (Pierce 1965:2.620-622; for examples of these logical types, see Robbins 1998a:196-197). Abduction is different from both induction and deduction but in some cases it is used interchangeably with deduction because it presupposes priority of the rule like deduction.

Regarding enthymeme, HWB Joseph made some important points on the character of the enthymeme (1921:352):

An enthymeme ... is not a particular form of argument, but a particular way of stating an argument. The name is given to a syllogism with one premise – or, it may be, the conclusion – suppressed. Nearly all syllogisms are, as a matter of fact, stated as enthymemes, except in examples of a logical treatise, or the conduct of a formal disputation. It must not be supposed, however, that we are the less arguing in syllogism, because we use one number of the argument without its being explicitly stated. Syllogism is an act of thought, and if, in order to perform this act, we need to recognise in thought all three propositions, we are arguing syllogistically, whether we enunciate the whole syllogism or not.

The most common word in enthymeme is the Greek particle γάρ (“for”), which provides a supporting reason or sometimes a corollary (Kennedy 1991:xii; Moores 1995:36). Other Greek hypotactic particles commonly – but not invariably – used in enthymeme are οὖν, ὅτι, ὥστε, and διὰ τοῦτο. Sometimes a paratactic style is used for argument. Beside these particles, we also look for clauses begun by ἵνα and ὅπως, which often show the result of the reasoning, as well as conditional sentences introduced by εἰαν and εἰ, which often contain an enthymeme with a suppressed rule (the protasis forms the case and the apodosis the result; Moores 1995:36-37; Eriksson 2000:4).

Eriksson offers advice on how to discern an enthymeme in a biblical text (2000:5). The first step is, of course, to find assertions and rationales. Usually, but not always, the assertion is stated before the rationale. The second step is to try to find the argumentative link, which gives an idea of how the rationale supports that particular assertion. This argumentative link is the rule, which guarantees the particular result drawn from the case. The rule is sometimes unstated. The third step is to see the typical components of the enthymeme, such as analogy, example, comparison, contrast and written testimony. These components are building blocks used for the elaboration of the *chreia* in the *progymasmata*. The fourth step is to look carefully at the “text’s micro-level, comprising a sentence or two”. Sometimes enthymemes can be connected to one another so that the same rule applies to some cases. The last step in finding an enthymeme is to see whether several subordinated enthymemes support the main assertion on a higher argumentative level. Thus interpreters should be careful to distinguish the different levels from one another. In addition to this, in successive enthymemes, sometimes the “result” in one enthymeme can become the “rule” in the next. This happens “when something has been established in one enthymeme, which is then used as the basis for the next line of reasoning” (Eriksson 2000:5). Let us analyze our text using this enthymemic method.

An Enthymemic Analysis

Our text consists of two subsections: vv. 1-3 and vv. 4-6. In verse 1 Paul lays down a thesis or a general principle that the law rules over people as long as they live. Then, in vv. 2-3 Paul provides a rationale for the thesis in the form of an analogy of marriage, which is shown by γάρ. This marriage analogy itself contains three subordinated enthymemes to explain the conclusion or thesis.

Let us first see in 7:1-3 how Paul persuades by means of a series of enthymemes:

Result: “The law has authority over a man only as long as he lives.”

Case: “for example (γάρ), by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive” (NIV).

Rule: Marriage law is a perfect example for showing the life-long authority of the law.

This example follows the typical order of enthymeme. The result or conclusion comes first, then the rationale (or reason), signaled by $\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$, which forms the case in the enthymeme. This pattern is a very common one among any cultural group. The rule is suppressed here as usual. This enthymeme leads naturally to the next subordinated enthymeme, which also supports the first main thesis or conclusion. However, Paul uses a contrasting case in order to support his main thesis. Here the law is not just the Mosaic law, because the following statements about marriage and its law are universal in nature, not limited to just one culture.

Case 1: “But ($\delta\epsilon$) if her husband dies.”

Result 1: “she [a married woman] is released from the law of marriage” (NIV).

Rule 1: Death severs a marriage relationship.

The rule that death dissolves a marriage relationship is again suppressed here. It is a topic that belongs to the common social and cultural texture of socio-rhetorical analysis. This enthymeme supports the main conclusion, for it provides a rationale why a person is under the law as long as he/she is alive. This is a strong argument, because it is based on irrefutable fact. This enthymeme is closely linked with the following one (see “so then”), which is another subordinated enthymeme that supports the same assertion or result. One thing we should note is that the law of marriage mentioned here is applicable to any society, not just Jewish society. But the situation described here is more relevant to the Jewish context.

Case 2: “So then ($\alpha\rho\alpha\ \omicron\upsilon\nu$), if she marries another man while her husband is still alive”.

Result 2: “she is called an adulteress”. (NIV).

Rule 2: Adultery is a sin when a married woman consorts with another man while her husband is still alive.

This subordinated enthymeme is a further specific case of the marriage relationship, used here to consolidate Paul’s thesis or conclusion. It is closely connected with the previous one, and then naturally leads to the last enthymeme in the series. It still supports the same assertion, but in this instance result 1 and the opposite of result 2 are combined in result 3.

Case 3: “But if her husband dies.”

Result 3: “she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man” (v. 3b; NIV).

Rule: For death severs a former marriage relationship; the sin of adultery is not applicable to a widow.

These three subordinated enthymemes emphasize the main thesis or conclusion that the law is applicable to human beings as long as they live. This means negatively that, when one of the marriage partners dies, the person left behind is free from the constraints of the marriage law. This marriage analogy with enthymemes fits perfectly as an explanation of this thesis or conclusion. Through this marriage analogy, Paul has an excellent argumentative tool for persuading the audience of his thesis. In using this analogy, Paul repeats his point thrice so that it cannot be refuted. Repetition is a powerful and effective device for argumentation (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969:144, 174-175). Through this repetition Paul lays down a most important principle concerning the human relationship with the law, as is seen in 7:1.

In the first subsection (vv. 1-3) Paul argues from the general to the particular: v. 1 is a general principle or “maxim” that is applicable to any legal system (Barclay 1958:94;

Tannehill 1967:44; Robinson 1979:77). For example, v. 2 is a particular case from marriage law. Verse 3 is a more specific case from the marriage system, i.e., the case of the adultery of a married woman. This is an argumentative technique of dissociation (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969:420, 423; Perelman 1982:130). Through this analysis we might conclude that the law has wider scope than the Mosaic Law. All supporting subordinated enthymemes used here are universal in nature applicable to any society, even though the law in question is more fitting to Jewish society.

Now we turn our attention to the second subsection (7:4-6). In v. 4 there are two important Greek particles ($\omega\sigma\tau\epsilon$ and $\iota\nu\alpha$), which indicate the presence of enthymeme. But this time only results are mentioned; case and rule are not stated because these have already been established in the previous co-texts (Rom. 6:1-11 and 7:1-3).

Case: If believers were united with Christ in his death and resurrection.

Result 1: “So ($\omega\sigma\tau\epsilon$), my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ.”

Result 2: “that ($\epsilon\iota\varsigma$) you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead.”

Result 3: “in order that ($\iota\nu\alpha$) we might bear fruit to God” (NIV).

Rule: Death terminates the former marriage relationship and is able to give the surviving partner an opportunity to have a new marriage.

This enthymeme is closely connected with previous enthymemes, especially the main enthymeme, since *the result of it becomes a rule for this line of reasoning*. So this enthymeme can be taken as a conclusion for what Paul has said in vv. 1-3. This is important, because everything that he has said in v. 4 is based on this “truth”, i.e., the believers’ union with Christ in his death and resurrection (Rom. 6:1-11). Paul uses here the second person plural pronoun “you” ($\u03b7\mu\epsilon\iota\varsigma$) for emphasis. Then, he uses the first person plural verb (“ $\kappa\alpha\rho\pi\omicron\phi\omicron\rho\eta\sigma\omega\mu\epsilon\nu$ ”) in result 3. This implies that what he said to his audience is true of himself. He recognizes that he himself too has died to the law through the body of Christ, and so includes himself for the purpose of expressing that union with Christ. This means that not only Roman believers but also Paul himself have to bear fruit to God. This strategy of Paul’s identification with his audience is one of the important persuasive strategies in Rom. 7.¹ Here we need to ask a question regarding the law. What is the law that Paul is talking about? It is not just the Mosaic Law as it is in v. 1 (contra Fitzmyer 1993:455-56; Schreiner 1998:346-47). The best understanding of the term as used here is God’s moral law (7:22), including the Mosaic Law and even the law written in the heart of the Gentiles (Rom. 2:14-15). Here Paul says that not only the condemnation of the law of God but also the power of the law that “wields the influence over human beings and exercises control by provoking sin” was broken by our participating in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ (Schreiner 1998:351). This wonderful truth about the believers’ lives, based on the enthymeme of v. 4, is further explained by two enthymemes in vv. 5 and 6.

Case: “For ($\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$) when we were in the flesh”
Result: “the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our members, so that ($\epsilon\iota\varsigma$) we bore fruit for death” (v.

¹ Another way of identification is the address “brothers”, an “in-group” term (Vorster 1991:115; Cronjé 1996:99).

5; translation is mine).[Rule: Sin as a real culprit uses the law for its evil purpose and brings death as a result (Rom. 6:23).]

Case: “But now (νυνὶ δὲ), by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law.”

Result: “so that (ὥστε) we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code” (NIV).

Rule: Believers’ participation in Christ’s death and resurrection changes their relationship with the law completely.

Verse 4 is the conclusion of what Paul has said in vv. 1-3, not an application (contra Moo 1991:438; Käsemann 1980:188; Schreiner 1998:349). Also present is Paul’s argumentation of dissociation. He first states a general truth of Christian life: believers have died to the law through participation in the death of Jesus Christ, and are remarried to the risen Christ. The object of that marriage is to bear fruit to God, i.e., their holiness or sanctification. Then, Paul further confirms or elucidates that truth negatively (v. 5) and positively (v. 6) (Moo 1991:439).

This is Paul’s way of argumentation: first laying down a general truth, then providing an explanation step by step, always adding new elements, and finally, drawing a conclusion (Little 1984:82-90). Once he has made a point, he moves forward; he continually adds new points. For example, the words “woman” and “husband” are no longer used from verse 4 onwards, once they have fulfilled their purpose. Another feature we note is that at the beginning Paul uses third person singular verbs and never uses personal pronouns. But in the middle he changes to second person plural verbs and pronouns, “you” twice (v. 4) and at the end he changes again to first person plural verbs and twice uses the pronoun “our (ἡμῶν)” in v. 5 and “we (ἡμεῖς)” in v. 6.

Furthermore, in verse 4 Paul provides the assertion or conclusion, which is based on the argumentation of vv. 1-3, and adds new concepts, contrasting two epochs of living, then and now. He also introduces here the bearing of fruits that resulted from each epoch (vv. 4, 5), which has already been mentioned in Rom. 6:21, 22. Thus at the end he concludes that Christians who have identified with Christ in death are released from the law in order to serve God in the newness of the Spirit, not in the oldness of the letter of the law.² This conclusion requires further explanation about the law, to which Paul responds in vv. 7-24.

In v. 5 Paul mentions the strange function of the law of God through which provokes and stimulates sin in unbelievers’ lives, shown by the past verb tense. Verse 5 is further explained in the rest of Rom. 7. In v. 6 Paul says that now as believers we have been released from the kind of power of the law that is explained in Rom. 8. Paul starts with the law of God and concludes what he said about the function of the law of God in v. 6, which represents the rhetorical device of *inclusio*. It is thus correct to see that the main subject of Rom. 7:1-6 is the law and its function in believers’ lives. In a sense, Paul is explaining here at length his previous statements on the law, which he made in 6:14 without explanation, where he said that Christians are “not under the law, but under grace” (Dunn 1988:339; Voorwinde 1990:21; Wright 1995:49; Thielman 1995:186 n.46).

² Some translations do not take this to mean the Holy Spirit. NEB, for example, has “to serve God in a new way, the way of the spirit, in contrast to the old way, the way of a written code”. Jerusalem Bible also translates it similarly. However, it is better to see it as a reference to the Spirit as we have in mind the topic of the life in the Spirit, which will be treated in Rom. 8 in detail. Furthermore, the fact that the similar thought (*gramma/pneuma* tension) is shown in 2 Co. 3:6, favors this translation (Harrison 1977:78).

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