

Free From the Law

Romans 7:1-6

Sally was married to Bill for many years. Then one evening Bill had a heart attack and died. Several years later Sally remarried a man named Jack. Jack was in many ways different than Bill. Bill didn't like to eat breakfast (he just grabbed a cup of coffee and headed out the door) and Jack liked to start his day with a big country breakfast. Bill didn't care if the house was kept clean and Jack wanted the house to be neat and tidy.

After Jack and Sally had been married for a year, Jack was beginning to get aggravated. He came down the stairs hoping to find things different but the house was messy and as he went into the kitchen hoping to smell bacon and eggs cooking on the stove, he only found a cup of cold coffee. When Jack voiced his dissatisfaction with the situation Sally said "well that's the way Bill liked things".

Jack said " Sally, Bill is dead. You are my wife now. You have to stop living like you are still married to Bill.

Today in Romans 7:1-6 we are going to learn that we are no longer married to the law. A death has taken place and now we are joined to Jesus Christ so that we might bear fruit for God.

In chapter 6 the theme was sin, and how being united with Christ in His death and resurrection has freed us from the power of sin. In Romans 7 Paul expounds on his statement in Romans 6:14, **"For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace."** We were not saved in order to sin, we were saved so that God's righteousness could be lived out in our lives.

Paul is writing in this whole section of chapters 6-8 about how the Christian can have real freedom from sin, how we can live out the righteousness that is ours through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul has gone to great lengths in chapters 1-5 to show that we cannot be justified, declared right with God, by keeping the law or the commandments of the Old Testament. We are declared righteous by God's grace shown to us in Christ. We receive the free gift of salvation from sin and death by faith alone, by believing in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for us.

There is a direct correlation between sin and the law. In 1 Corinthians 15:56 Paul writes, **"The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law."** If we are going to have true freedom from sin, we must also have true freedom from the law.

The theme of chapter 7 is the believer's relationship to the law, in fact Paul uses the word law over 20 times in chapter 7. Paul is going to prove that not only are we justified apart from the law, but we are also sanctified apart from the law. In other words we are not only saved from the penalty of sin by faith in Jesus, but we are also saved from the power of sin through Jesus, not through the law.

Verses 1-6 are easy to outline. In verse 1 Paul gives a *principle*, a general statement of truth. In verses 2-3, Paul uses marriage to *illustrate* that principle and in verses 4-6 Paul *applies* the principle to our lives as believers in Christ.

- *The Principle: Death liberates from the law (verse 1)*

- *The Illustration: Death ends the law of marriage (verses 2-3)*
- *The Application: We have been liberated from the law (verses 4-6)*

Please turn to Romans 7 and follow along as I read:

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.

The main point of this passage is that through our union with Christ, we have died to the law so that we are free to bear fruit for God in the Spirit. We could put it this way: *True freedom from sin comes from a relationship with Jesus, not from rules.*

1. Proposition: Death liberates from the law (Ro 7:1).

Paul begins this chapter with a general principle that we all know to be true. Verse 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?”***

When Paul uses the word “law” here and many other places in Romans, he is referring mainly to the Old Testament law, or especially the 10 Commandments. But the principle Paul gives here really applies to all laws of God and men: The law has jurisdiction only over those who are alive. The law does not apply to those who have died.

Imagine a man breaks the law by driving while drunk. The law has penalties for those who do that, at least a ticket and possibly jail or prison. Now Imagine this man who is breaking the law by drunk driving plows his car into a tree and he is killed. Will a policeman give that man a ticket for DUI? Will a judge sentence him to jail? Will they take his body and bury it in the prison yard so he can serve his sentence?

Of course not. No one can expect the law to have authority over a dead man.

So how do we get out from under the law? The only way to break the bondage is through death: ***“...the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives.”***

So that we will understand this truth better Paul gives an example:

2. Illustration: Death ends the law of marriage (Ro 7:2-3).

Paul illustrates the principle just stated in verse 1 with a practical example in verses 2 and 3. A married woman is bound to her husband by law. Because of this legal bondage to her husband, she is not free to marry another man. To marry another while her husband is alive would make her an adulteress. But death changes everything. The death of her husband nullifies the law, so far as her remarriage is concerned.

Listen again to verses 2-3:

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.

Although what this passage says about the law of marriage is true, the real reason why Paul brings up marriage is to illustrate the principle he has just stated in verse 1.

A new relationship is only possible when there is a release from the old. The word **“released”** is used in Ro 7:2-3 and then again in verse 6 and means *“to be discharged, free, at liberty and unconstrained.”* It was also used of making the power or force of something ineffective. Paul says it this way in 1 Corinthians 7:39:

A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord.”

Marriage is a contract and a covenant that is dissolved by death. That’s why most wedding vows include the words *“till death do us part”* or *“as long as we both shall live.”*

The authority of the law is set aside by death. Death frees one from the law and its bondage.

Paul is wanting to show that ***True release comes from a new relationship with Jesus, not from following the old rules.***

3. Application: We are freed from the law to serve in the Spirit (Ro 7:4-6).

We know that we’re moving to application now from the use of the phrase, **“So, my brothers...”** Let’s break-down these action steps phrase-by-phrase, taken directly from these three verses.

A. Understand your death to the law. Look at verse 4: ***“Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ ...”***

In chapter 6 Paul made it clear that in Christ we have died to sin, Romans 6:6-7, **“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.”** Now Paul makes the addition truth that because we have died with Christ, **“we have been united together in the likeness of His death,”** we have also died to the law. Remember the point from verse 1, the law has no jurisdiction over those who have died.

Galatians 2:19: ***“For through the law I died to the law so that I might live to God.”*** We can never truly live for the Lord by living under the law. While the law is good, (Paul will say that in verse 12) it can’t make you good – it’s incapable and inadequate to do so as we learned in [Romans 5:20](#): ***“The law was added so that the trespass might increase...”***

The law will never commend you. The law is only there to condemn you. Think about traffic laws again for a moment. How many of you have been pulled over by a policeman and been given a compliment for your good driving? Did a law enforcement officer ever give a positive citation for obeying the law? No, they give citations for breaking the law. That is the nature of law, it never commends us to God, it can only condemn us when we break it. The law always points out what we’ve done wrong but never compliments us when we do things right.

James 2:10 says, ***“For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.”*** It doesn’t matter how many rules and laws we keep, when we break one law, we are a lawbreaker. The law is designed to condemn, not commend.

The good news is that we have died to the law. Dying to the law means that we do not approach God by a system of performance, where we try to earn right standing with Him. That is the way of virtually every religion in the world, including many that go under the name of “Christian.” The good news is that God justifies sinners by grace through faith alone in Jesus Christ (Rom. 4:5; Phil. 3:2-10). Paul’s point in Romans 7 is not only that we are justified by grace through faith alone, but also that we are sanctified in the same way (see Col. 2:6).

The law held us in bondage. It did so by putting us under a curse because of our failure to obey it perfectly (Gal. 3:10). The law increased our transgressions and held us under the reign of sin and death (Rom. 5:20-21).

B. Say “I Do” to Jesus. Verse 4 continues: ***“...that you may be married to another--to Him who was raised from the dead...”*** Our relationship with rules and expectations has ended and we’ve been released so that we ***“belong to another.”***

We used to be married to rules before we were Christians, and now we’ve been released for marriage to the Master, Jesus Christ. The key to the Christian life is a love relationship not a law relationship. Have you ever said “I do” to the love of Jesus? He’s done all the work so we don’t have to. If not, why not? I not now, when? If you’ve been drifting, it’s time to rekindle your relationship.

The last part of verse 4 shows us the result of being joined to Christ: ***“that we should bear fruit to God.”*** The product of true faith is always fruit. We have died to the law and now belong to the Lord so *that* we might be fruit bearers. John 15:8: ***“This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”***

If you want to know what this fruit should look like in our lives see Galatians 5:22-23. ***“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”*** Our fruit should be evident in our character, our conduct and in the converts that come to Christ through our witness. It should be seen in our attitudes, our actions and

in our offspring. Here's a question. If your life is a garden, what kind of fruit do people find there?

C. Don't go back to the law. As believers we're going to have to fight against the performance mentality all the time. We need to remember what that got us before we were believers and determine to not live under legalistic rules and regulations. Look at verse 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."*** The word "aroused" means to be awakened to those overwhelming impulses to think and do evil.

Paul asks a penetrating question in Galatians 3:3: ***"Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?"***

The law is not the answer to our sin problem. Trying to keep the law can never reconcile us to the holy God, because we've all violated His law many times over. Posting a list of God's commandments on the refrigerator and trying to keep them by our own strength won't work, either, because the law just incites our sinful passions. It does not quench the desire to sin.

David Hoke suggests the following characteristics of those who live under the law. See if any of these find traction in your actions and attitudes (www.horizonsnet.org).

- Pride. Even though we know we cannot meet all the standards, it's very easy to boast about our own accomplishments. A focus on performance always leads to pride.
- Critical spirit. Another way to recognize people who live under the law is that they become very critical of others. Have you noticed that there's just something about the law that makes us judge others? We can be blind to error in our own lives and yet we often have our eyes wide open to the faults of others.
- Hypocrisy. Because there is an inherent tension in trying to live by the law, and we know we're not meeting the subscribed standards, there's a temptation to appear like we're meeting them. This leads to hypocrisy.

So how do we get out from under the law? The only way to break the bondage is through death. Verse 6, ***"But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by."*** Another version of that verse says, ***"But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law."***

D. Serve in the power of the Spirit. We have been set free in order to serve. Look at the second half of Romans 7:6: ***"... so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter."***

Our bondage to sin is linked to our bondage to the Law. The solution to this problem is not more law, it is Christ. In Christ, we died to the Law and to its reign over us. In dying to the Law, sin no longer has mastery over us. Death to the Law, and its strong pull on our fallen flesh, is to be replaced by a life lived through God's Spirit.

Paul will give us more details on the living in the power of the Spirit in chapter 8.

But for now let's just end with a couple questions.

Are you serving the Savior or are you just sitting back? All true believers live a life of service to God. How are you serving?

Have you discovered the new way of the Spirit or are you still doing things the old way? If you are characterized by those attitudes of legalism, pride, a critical spirit, and hypocrisy, chances are, you are still trying to do things in your flesh, not by God's Spirit.

Remember, *True release comes from a relationship with Jesus, not from rules.*

let me say a final word to any of you who may not yet have come to faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. Christianity has always had its hypocrites and its bad examples. There are those who would abuse the grace of God, making it an excuse (perhaps even a mandate) for their sin. They are wrong! There are also those who would seek to put Christians under a long list of rules, usually Don'ts. These folks are wrong too. Christianity is not a religion of "do's and don'ts" but a relationship where we say "I do" to Jesus Christ.

I love the words to this hymn called "Free from the Law."

**Free from the law, O happy condition,
Jesus has bled and there is remission,
Cursed by the law and bruised by the fall,
Grace hath redeemed us once for all.
Once for all, O sinner, receive it,
Once for all, O brother, believe it;
Cling to the cross, the burden will fall,
Christ hath redeemed us once for all.**