



Romans 7:1 13

Law —What Law?

The Apostle Paul tells about a person who was married to a demanding perfectionist. He laid the law down to her day after day. He made insistent demands on her behavior. There was no escaping his cruel guilt trips. No matter how hard she tried nothing she ever did was good enough to please him. It was impossible to live up to his standards of behavior and conduct. No matter how hard she tried, she was a failure.

Because of his persistent attitudes her feelings altered between fear of his exacting demands and judgment to a sense of complete failure, guilt, resentment and hostility. Her situation was hopeless. He was perfect and she was just the opposite. Living with him was impossible.

How long could she go on in this situation? Secretly she wished he were dead. Nevertheless, he was in perfect health and strict moralist. He wasn't going to go away. He wasn't going to die and, of course, divorce was out of the picture.

Then would you know it, she met another man. This man was everything she ever wanted. Yes, he was perfect, but his perfection was balanced with love. There was grace about him. She found it impossible to resist his powerful unselfish love for her. Moreover, she wanted an intimate love relationship with him!

In time, he asked her to be his. Oh, yes, he was aware of her present state. She belonged to another man. She was married. Moreover, the law was very clear about adultery. "The law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives." When a person dies that is the end of the authority of the law. However, after he dies she is free to marry anyone she pleases.

Remember, this old man was not going to die, and he would never consent to divorce so there was only one alternative. She would have to die! Then the law could have no effect on her. She could marry whom ever she pleased and be innocent.

I know. You are asking the question, "But if she were *dead*, how could she possibly marry her suitor?"

There is only one way. She would have to die and rise from the dead! (Illustration by Hal Lindsey adapted from *Liberation of the Planet Earth*, p.179).

The Apostle Paul tells us that is exactly what happened to us. "Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit for God" (Romans 7:4). Remember, "we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be

self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him" (6:5-8).

This truth is so crucial to the believer's daily walk with Christ that Paul reminds us to "consider (reckon, count upon the fact) yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:11). God's solution to our sin problem was to crucify us with Christ. As far as God is concerned we were there in the grave with Christ and we rose into newness of life with Him. Now we are joined in an intimate union with our Lord and Savior. Paul develops this idea and applies it to the believer in Romans chapter seven. Our understanding of this great chapter is vital to our abiding in Christ.

Please keep in mind the context of Romans chapters five and six. The apostle Paul has stressed the believer has died to sin (6:2) and to law (7:4). He is free from sin (6:18) and from law (7:3). He is 'justified from sin' (6:7) and discharged 'from law' (7:6). He walks in newness of life (6:4) and serves in newness of Spirit (7:6)" (Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 270).

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Romans 10:4).

OUR POSITION WITH REGARD TO THE LAW (7:1-6)

The principle (v. 1)

Death settles all scores. You cannot prosecute a dead man. "Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives?" When life ceases, law no longer has power over that person.

Paul's use of the word "law" refers to a standard of conduct that is generally agreed to and expected of men in society. We are expected to live up to the laws of the land which is a standard of conduct for our behavior. The Law of Moses in the Old Testament expresses this kind of law. In a much wider sense it is that unspoken standard of behavior that people hold universally. In every society there is an unspoken standard of conduct to which is referred to. No matter what his background, every person in a society accepts a standard of conduct. Romans chapter two describes such a standard of behavior. All laws lose their power when a person dies.

The illustration (vv. 2-3)

Paul uses an illustration on marriage to declare a general principle about our spiritual marriage to Christ. The law only has authority over a man for as long as he lives. Death of either spouse ends a marriage and the hold of the law over that relationship. A second marriage is legitimate only if death has terminated the first. If the husband dies, then she is free to marry again. See Matthew 5:32; I Corinthians 7:15, 39.

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The Apostle Paul summarizes the Law of God regarding marriage in verses two and three. "For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man."

What is the purpose of the law? It is to hold the person guilty who breaks it. It condemns the lawbreaker. The law never says, "Hey, you are doing a great job. Keep it up!" It does not come along side and give you the power to obey it. All it can do is point its finger and say, "You are guilty!" The married woman who lives in a marriage relationship with two men is guilty of adultery. However, if the husband dies she is free from the law. It no longer has power over the relationship because he is dead. The purpose of the law is to set a standard and bring condemnation and guilt to those who do not live up to it. Moreover, it proves to us that we can not please God by fulfilling the law. No one is capable.

Now that is just where the good news comes in. What we could not do, God does in His marvelous grace.

The application (vv. 4 -6)

Don't get side tracked with the woman in this illustration. Marriage is just the explanation. The point of Paul's illustration is not that the woman has two husbands. The point Paul is making is what the death of the first husband does to the woman's relationship to the law. Legal obligation is terminated by death. The death of either spouse dissolves the marriage. If either chooses to remarry there is no blemish attached to the new relationship. Therefore, just as death ends the marriage, so death has ended our bondage to the law. The law simply said, "The two of you must stay together because you are married." The woman who is married is helpless to change her situation until her husband dies. Any attempt on her part to do so beforehand only violates the law and makes matters worse.

"Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God"(v. 4).

Who died? Paul changes characters in his illustration. "You" died. We believers in Jesus Christ are portrayed in the woman. When did you die? When you believed on Christ. Freedom didn't come by doing away with the law. It came by the law being fulfilled. "The soul that sins will surely die." "The wages of sin is death." Through Christ's vicarious substitutionary death, all the law's demands were fulfilled. As my representative, He died my death. He paid my death penalty. "He who knew no sin was made sin for us" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Don't miss it. "He *was made sin* for us" (emphasis mine). When Christ became what we are, He became our old husband and He died. When Christ died, our old man, self centered ego, Adamic nature died, and we were set free. Therefore, when we believed on Christ we were released from the law by becoming dead to the law "through the body of Christ." It is we who are "crucified with Christ." Observe how closely we are identified with Christ. Believers are one body with Christ, therefore, when His body died, they also died. The law cannot condemn the believer because he who was made a curse for them redeemed them from its curse. He died to sin, and to the law having fulfilled it by His obedience and death, so that it has no further demand upon Him. By His death, they are dead to the law, freed from it, and done with it. This death dissolves our marriage obligation to the law. Now we are free to be joined to another, the Risen Christ. This great truth is ours from the moment we received Christ Jesus into our life as Lord and Savior.

Who is the first husband? The context indicates the first husband is Adam, the old life in which we were born. We were related to Adam. It is our old man, our old self, our old life we received from Adam. It is what the Scripture calls "sin." We were married to old Adam's nature and we could not get away from it. Sin inhabited man's spirit at the fall and has been passed down to every human being ever since. It has reigned there, undisturbed and unchallenged until Jesus came. He is the only exception to this rule. It is like a young beautiful woman who is married to an old, cruel, mean tyrant. While she is married, she is tied to him. There is no legitimate out. When her husband dies she is free from the condemnation of the law and can marry again. When she gets married to her new suitor, the law is absolutely silent. It has nothing on her. It is dead.

Remember Romans 6:6-7 says, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin."

Now we are freed from the old husband, and we are free from the law that bound us to him. Now we are free to marry another. It is our own death (in Christ) which sets us free to marry again. Christ is now our lawful husband. Believers are married to Him, and are one with Him, in His resurrection.

We who were bound to the law have now died to it. Now we are free to be joined to Christ, with whom we not only died, but rose again. In our unsaved life we were "married" to the law, obligated to obey it; now we have been set free to marry Christ. Just as Christ once became our old self on the cross and died, now He is free to live His life through us. He frees us to become our true self. The Holy Spirit is working in us to present us complete, mature, and perfect in Christ Jesus. The Spirit of the living Christ is free to live that same wonderful, holy, perfect, beautiful, mighty life through us. Sin must leave when He takes up His residence within us. Am I abiding in Christ? Is He abiding in me?

Christ bore the penalty of the law on our behalf (6:23), and rose from the dead. The moment we were born again we were identified with Christ's death and resurrection. We are no longer under the law, but under grace (6:14).

Romans 6:11 reminds us to call this to mind. "Even so consider (reckon, count upon the fact) yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus." As our representative Christ became our first husband, that Adamic nature to which we were married, and when He became that, He died. Moreover, when He died, we were set free. Because of his death and our death in Him, the law has nothing to say to us anymore. We are now free to marry another—the risen Christ. Our first husband is Christ crucified on our behalf; our second husband is Christ risen from the dead. Because of our new identification with Him, we share His name, His power, His experiences, His hope, His position, His coming glory. All that He is is now ours. We are now married to Christ the risen from the dead and the law has nothing more to say to us.

Luther observed, "It is impossible for a man to be a Christian without having Christ; and if he has Christ, he has at the same time all that is in Christ. What gives peace to the conscience is, that by faith our sins are no more ours, but Christ's, upon whom God has laid them all; and that, on the other hand, all Christ's righteousness is ours, to whom God has given it. Christ lays His hand upon us, and we are healed. He lays His mantle upon us, and we are clothed; for He is the glorious Savior, blessed forever."

Verses 5 and 6 contrasts two marriages.

Pre conversion life (v. 5)

Our life before Christ is described with the words "flesh," "sin," "law," "death." I was married to Adam and all that relationship produced was death. My human nature as it is controlled and directed by sin stood guilty and condemned. "Flesh" here signifies man in his ruined condition or the total corruption in which all the children of Adam's race are born. The law exposes our solidarity with Adam. Sin takes control of the flesh. It is a life dominated by our lower human nature. F. F. Bruce said, "to be 'in the flesh' is to be unregenerate, to be still 'in Adam,' in a state in which one 'cannot please God' (Romans 8:8)." Death is the consequence or end secured by our sins. It is the logical outcome. We deserve the death penalty because we are sinners. We stand guilty because we are guilty.

"For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were *aroused* by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death" (v. 5).

The new life married to Christ (v. 6)

"But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter" (v. 6).

The death is the believer's death through union with Christ. We died to the law through the death of our first husband. When Christ was crucified the first husband died. Now we are tied to Jesus. He is our life and we are now acting according to our true nature.

"As far as the law is concerned we have been made null and void. There is no link between the believer and the law. Our salvation is not due to the law. We are delivered from the law because we have died to that by which we were held down" (Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 275).

"But now . . . we serve in the newness of the Spirit." The Holy Spirit is the author of this new state of mind. Emancipation from the law does not mean we are free to do as we please. Freedom from the law is not a license to sin. We are free from the law—but free to serve Christ, not to sin. It is not a life free of responsibilities; we are still responsible to serve righteousness. Cf. Galatians 5:1, 13–14. We now lean back upon the mighty, refreshing, indwelling, conquering life of Christ within us. We now in the newness of the Spirit quietly count on Him to live and work in and through us to do all that He wants to do. We allow Him to be Himself in us.

THE PURPOSE OF THE LAW (7:7–13)

The law defines sin for us (v. 7b).

The law cannot deliver the sinner. It is powerless to do so. It only makes the bondage bitterer. Does that make the law sinful? No, it merely exposes sin wherever it finds it. Remember how Paul had gloried in his works until the law convicted him of covetousness? (Philippians 3:3, 4). Paul's conviction of sin came with the realization that the law condemned the secret desires of his sinful heart. In its cutting and convicting power it brings healing because it opens us up to Christ. Only when Paul understood the law in its full extent, did he become self-condemned. The tenth commandment makes the law keeping impossible and makes the sinner hopeless.

"What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, 'You shall not covet.' "

The law exposes our depraved sinful nature (v. 8).

We want to do what is forbidden. Our real problem is indwelling sin, not the law (vv. 5, 8-9).

"But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin *is* dead" (v. 8).

The law has a way of exposing us like when we see the signs that say: "Speed Limit 55," or "No fishing," "No walking on grass." The law brings out the worst in us. It seems to dare us to do it. It exposes our sinful nature. We learn what the law is and we want what is forbidden.

Several years ago a beautiful hotel was built in Galveston, Texas which jutted out over the water in the bay. It had large plate glass windows that captured the Gulf of Mexico. The balconies on each room made an ideal fishing peer! Right after it was opened a daring anxious fisherman cast his reel from a patio and knocked out the windows below in the dining room. The administration quickly put up signs in every room of the hotel that read: "No fishing from patios." The idea caught on quickly! People thought that is a great idea! Everyone decided to try it! Even those who could care less about fishing joined in. They kept knocking out windows. Finally, one bright administrator came up with the idea of removing the no fishing signs. Guess what happened. People quit fishing!

Sin found a base of operations for war on our soul. John Murray is correct when he says, "The more the light of the law shines upon and in our depraved hearts, the more the enmity of our minds is roused to opposition, and the more it is made manifest that the mind of the flesh is not subject to the law of God, neither can be" (John Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, p. 185).

The law doesn't cause sin; it discovers it and reveals our sinful nature to us. It strips away our disguises and deceit and brings it to light. "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us" (1 John 1:9).

The law brings condemnation for sin (vv. 8b-13; 6:23).

"Apart from the law sin is dead." Paul had no conviction about his sin until the law aroused within his heart every sort of sinful desire. It exposed his heart for what it really was.

Before he met Christ on the road to Damascus Paul thought keeping the law would bring eternal life and please God, but instead he fell under its judgment. The proud self-righteous Pharisee was "alive" in his own self-esteem and religious feelings. However, when the Holy Spirit applied to his heart the law he lost that good opinion of himself and he "died." The law revealed Paul's hopeless nature. In stead of making him feel good about his self-righteousness, it only condemned his sin.

The power of the Law brings conviction of sin. We see ourselves for what we really are and we die. It kills our arrogant pride. It exposes the seriousness of our sin and unbelief. It is my sin, not someone else's. "Against Thee, and Thee only have I sinned." "Oh God woe is me!" is the cry of the sinner exposed to the Law of God. The purpose of the law is to reveal my desperate need for God's abundant grace in Jesus Christ. It cannot save. It was never intended to save us. It can not even sanctify the Christian. There is no power in it to produce its demands.

Charles Hodge notes, "How vain therefore is it to expect salvation from the law, since all the law does, in its operation on the unrenewed heart, is to condemn and to awaken opposition! It cannot change the nature of

operation on the unrenewed heart, is to condemn and to awaken opposition! It cannot change the nature of man."

Sin blinds the human heart to the reality of its true condition. The deceitfulness of sin led Paul to expect one thing while he experienced another. "He expected life, and found death. He expected happiness, and found misery; he looked for holiness, and found increased corruption" (Hodge).

Here is Paul's testimony as to the power of the law. "I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good" (vv. 9-13). When used correctly that is what the law always does. It strips us of our pride and arrogance and brings us to our knees so we can trust in the only one who can save us. The death we died in our union with Christ is a saving death. It is "a death that frees us from our bondage to sin." We die a spiritual death when we come to realize that we are not good and decent people in God's sight. We are sinners and we are lost without Christ. It marks the end of our self-confidence, self-satisfaction, self-reliance and self-esteem. It brings death.

Paul makes the purpose of the law clear in Galatians 3:22-26. "But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore, the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus."

SOME ABIDING PRINCIPLES FOR BELIEVERS TODAY

What is my attitude toward the law?

What is your attitude toward the law? The law is not evil. It is "holy, and just, and good." Sin is the true source of all evil. The law is our friend because it reveals our true self and points us to Jesus as our only hope of salvation and life. God is the author of the Law and it reveals His holy and perfect character. It reflects the transcendence and purity of God. It promotes only the highest well-being and goodness of God. In verses-7-13, Paul has given us his life before conversion. He demonstrates for us how the law of God brought conviction to his heart.

Charles Spurgeon said, "An unchanged life is a sign of an unregenerate heart." We no longer have any excuse. As long as we make excuses for our sin, we are slaves to it.

The Legalist fears the law. He is a man in bondage to the law. He is proud of his law-keeping and imagines he can be justified and sanctified by keeping the law. The law produces failure. No man can live up to its demands. Legalists are critical of other people. It is a defense mechanism. They are guilty of the same faults. They don't want to admit their sins. There is a sense of defeat and failure. That is the purpose of the law. It shows us just how desperately evil we are. It reveals our arrogance and pride.

The Antinomian or Libertine hates the law and blames man's moral and spiritual problems in the law (vv. 7-13). He fails to realize we are free from the law—but we are free to serve Christ, not to sin. In the eyes of those who hate the law, everyone does what is right in his own eyes.

However, the Law-abiding believer loves and delights in law and seeks by the power of the indwelling Spirit to obey it (8:3). Calvin said this freedom "is not from the righteousness which is taught in the law, but from the rigid demands of the law and from the curse which follows from its demands." Morris adds, "It is not the

the rigid demands of the law and from the curse which follows from its demands." Morris adds, "It is not the law that dies, but the believer. The law still points to the kind of living that is pleasing in the sight of God. But the believer is dead to all forms of legalism. He will engage in upright living as the result but not the cause of his salvation" (Morris, p. 272). "The believer's death with Christ . . . is a death to the law. Salvation by grace, by trusting Christ, means a complete end to trust in the law" (Morris, p. 273).

I am not capable of keeping the law by myself. The Holy Spirit enables me to do what I cannot do by myself, even as a Christian. I love the law and delight in it. I meditate on it. It provides guidance into what God is like, and what He wants me to become in Christ. As a law abiding believer I now fulfill the law because I want to, not because I want to merit acceptance with God. When I fail, I don't have to believe that God is unhappy with me because He has made provision for this. I have His forgiveness and His grace and strength. I don't have to live in fear of the law.

Romans 8:1 says I am no longer condemned by the Law. "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Why do we serve?

We are motivated by love for Christ. I want to please Him because I love Him. Our marriage to Christ is not an end in itself. It is in order that we might have fruitful lives. We have been united to Him for the purpose of producing the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). He wants to see us producing love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, etc. Salvation leads to obedience to the law. We are free to serve a new Master. We have a new Husband. My allegiance is now with Christ. When you are in love you want to live in a manner that pleases the person you love. That takes care of the obedience and the "want to" problem. If I love Him, I will obey Him.

How do we serve?

The whole purpose of Paul's argument is that we might belong to another person. We now have an intimate love relationship with "Him who was risen from the dead." We serve the risen Savior in the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. We cannot live the Christian life without the Holy Spirit. We are free to serve Christ and His righteousness. We are free from the condemnation of the law. We are now married to Christ, who is risen from the dead, and we have a new identity. We are free to do what we were designed to do. The only life that is fruitful in God's eyes is the life of Jesus Christ in you and me. The only life God will accept is the risen life of Jesus lived again through you and me. All other effort is carnal and fruitless. All we can produce in the flesh is the fruit of death.

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