

Til Death Do Us Part

Romans 7:1-6

January 7, 2018

Introduction:

This morning we are hopping back into the saddle of our study of the book of Romans. Over the past three months we've taken a hiatus from it in order to give our attention to the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation and to celebrate the season of Advent, but with all that behind us, we need to resume where we left off back in October.

But since it's been so long, I thought to begin today I would do a very quick review of what we've learned in Romans thus far in order to get us up to speed. So here we go: you might recall that after the introductory salutations, the apostle Paul spent the majority of the first three chapters of Romans laying out the bad news about God's wrath. He said in 1:18 that, *"The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men..."* and then continued to make the case that all men - both Jews and Gentiles - have sinned by either violating the written law of Moses or the law written on their hearts and therefore no one would be justified in God's sight by obedience to the law since everyone without exception has violated it.

Then in 3:21 Paul moved from the bad news of God's wrath to the good news that there was a way for sinners to be declared righteous apart from the law, and that was through faith in Christ, who lived the righteous life we should have lived and died the death we should have died. He then went on in chapter 4 to demonstrate that salvation was always to come by faith and not by works by using the example of Abraham, who Scripture says that *"he believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness."* Thus, as a result of Christ, Paul told us in chapter 5 that we now have peace with God through faith in Christ's atoning sacrifice on our behalf.

But lest we think that's the end of the story and that we can do whatever we want because of God's grace given to us in Christ, in chapter 6 Paul addressed the issue of what it meant to be dead to sin and alive to Christ. He reminded us that since we've been liberated from our enslavement to sin, we shouldn't go back to sin's slavery but instead live for God.

That then brings us right to the front door of chapter 7, which is where we will be picking things up this morning. Paul is continuing to encourage his readers to not use the grace of God as a license to sin. Our freedom from the law is not freedom to continue to sin but rather a joyful liberty to bear the fruits of righteousness that come from the new life we've received in Christ.

So with that overview under our belts, let's jump into our passage this morning by opening your Bibles with me to Romans 7, which in the pew Bibles can be found on pg. 943. Our focus this morning will be given to the first six verses. So again, I'm in Romans 7, reading v. 1-6. **"Or do you not know, brothers - for I am speaking to those who know the law - that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives? For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released**

from the law of marriage. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress.

Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.”

So what’s going on here? Well, Paul is laying out a principle he expects his readers to understand in order to help them grasp the significance of what has taken place when they trusted Christ as their Lord and Savior. Let’s consider this more closely now as we begin with our first point, which is...

1. The principle stated: The law is binding only as long as one lives

Paul expects the Romans to understand the principle he presents in v. 1. Look back in your Bibles with me once again. He says, **“Or do you not know, brothers - for I am speaking to those who know the law - that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives?”** Although Paul has yet to visit Rome personally, he knows enough about them to know that they have knowledge of the law, specifically the Law of Moses as revealed in the OT. The church in Rome was composed of a mix of Jews, who of course knew the law, and Gentiles who were likely God-fearers who had a working knowledge of the law.

So based on their knowledge he anticipates they would be well-aware of the principle that, **“the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives.”** Of course, you and I are quite aware of this as well. Let’s say a man commits a crime and is sentenced to 30 years in prison but ten years into his sentence he dies. Does the law demand that his corpse remain in prison to finish out his last twenty years? Or course not. Once he dies, his sentence no long applies. Death terminates the ruling of the law over him.

Or let’s say an actor had a contract with a movie studio to appear in a trilogy of movies but died shortly after the first movie had been filmed. Is the actor held responsible for not appearing in the last two movies such that he’s in legal violation of breaching his contract? Once again, the answer is obvious. Once the individual dies, there is no legal responsibility to fulfill the contract because he’s dead. The law doesn’t apply to the deceased. Once someone dies, he dies to the laws under which he used to live.

I might add that it is said the only two certain things in this world are death and taxes, but while paying taxes won’t help you escape death, dying will most certainly put an end to paying taxes! Taxes are a legal obligation we only become free of when we die. So then, we all understand this principle because that’s how it works for us too. The law - whether it be criminal law or contractual laws or tax laws - only apply to us while we are living. As soon as we die, we’re no longer bound to them.

Well, Paul has his own illustration he wants to use in v. 2-3 to help make his point and so moving on now to our second point, we find this...

2. The principle illustrated: The law of marriage only applies to the living

Look back in your Bibles at v. 2-3. **“For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress.”**

Jewish women were not permitted to divorce their husbands, so a wife was indeed **“bound by law to her husband”** as long as he lived. Were a woman to abandon her husband and begin a new relationship with another man, she would be guilty of adultery since in the eyes of the law she would still be married to her first husband. The only way she would be free of that is if her husband died. Death of either one of the spouses would terminate the marriage and allow the surviving partner to remarry.

Once again, this point isn't difficult for us to understand because the death of a spouse works exactly the same way in our society. The death of either the husband or the wife automatically brings an end to the marriage. The vows of commitment of “Til death do us part” come into their final effect as the husband and wife are parted from each other by death and as a result, the surviving spouse is free to marry someone else because he or she is no longer bound by the law.

I don't think it is necessary for me to belabor this point as I think the principle that Paul is presenting for about how death releases us from the binding authority of the law is readily understood and recognized by all of us. Whether it be a spouse dying that allows for remarriage, or an individual dying that frees him from paying taxes or fulfilling a contract or serving a prison sentence, the law is only binding on a person while he lives. Check the box: understood. So then, these first two points have been brief because they are merely the on-ramp to the real discussion Paul wishes to make in applying that principle to us as Christians. So moving on now to our third and much longer and more significant point, we see this...

3. The principle applied: We died with Christ to the law: therefore we are not bound by it any longer.

Where this is all leading up to comes in here at v. 4. Follow along in your Bibles as I read it. **“Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.”** Paul echoes the language he used in his illustration about marriage saying that through faith in Christ, they have **“died to the law”** with the purpose that they **“may belong to another.”** I don't want you to miss the metaphor Paul's alluding to here. Paul is saying that since we've died to the law, we are free to belong to someone else, namely Christ. So what he's saying in effect is that as Christians, we're married to Christ, metaphorically speaking.

Let me camp here for a few moments because this metaphor Paul uses paints for us a beautiful picture of our salvation. Paul has talked about sin as something we were enslaved to under the law, so imagine yourself enslaved - think American slavery in the 19th century if you must. You were in bondage to a cruel and wicked master who made your life miserable as you had to obey his commands, causing you to engage in all manner of things which only brought you misery and pain. That's your life before Christ, one that those who have lived in the world for any length of time know is true. Your enslavement to sin under the law did not bring joy. It never fulfilled you. It only brought about broken relationships, addictions, heartache, suffering.

Then Christ comes to rescue you. The chains that once bound you are unshackled. He takes you by the hand and invites you to follow him, to leave behind all the misery that sin has brought you. He cleans you off, discards the rags you once wore and replaces it with a clean white robe. He invites you to join him in a feast unlike any other, with food that is rich and abundant, far superior to the wretched slop you once relied on for your nourishment under your former master.

But not only is Christ your liberator; the feast you are invited to is a wedding feast and you are not merely a guest. In fact, you're to be the bride of Christ! He has promised to love you with an everlasting love such that your relationship with him is not merely that of an impersonal rescuer, but the deepest personal relationship two people could ever share together. Christ does not merely rescue the captives: he marries them with a love that will never let them go. That is what Christ has done for you.

And that's not just a metaphor used here: Paul describes God's people elsewhere as the Bride of Christ in Ephesians 5 and Scripture speaks of the "marriage supper of the Lamb" in Revelation 19. So when Paul says here that we died to the law that we might "**belong to another**" he wants us to see ourselves as the Bride of Christ.

Now if that's true, and it is, then that has profound implications for this issue of whether we can continue in sin, an issue that Paul has been addressing since chapter 6. Since we've been justified by faith and not by works, can we therefore live however we want? No, because we are married to Christ!

Think about this for a moment. Marriage limits your freedom. When you are married, you can't just do whatever you want. A single person can make decisions unilaterally but a married person cannot. You have an obligation to your spouse. But this isn't a begrudging duty: if you love your spouse, you'll want to limit your freedom for their sake. Love compels you to do and not do certain things in light of your spouse.

So then, if you love Jesus and recognize his deep love for you that rescued you from sin's dominion, are you really going to want to continue doing those things he hates? What kind of spouse would I be if I purposefully chose to do things that made Karen unhappy and angry with me? My love for Karen limits my freedom because I'll want to do those things that would please her and avoid those things which would grieve her. So it is with Christ. If you are a Christian, you belong to another. You are the bride of Christ and his love for you and your love for him should absolutely affect the decisions

you make. A person who truly loves Jesus and has been rescued from sin's power will live differently because that's what true love does. It lives in light of the beloved in order to please him.

So then, when Paul says at the end of v. 4 that we died to the law **"in order that we may bear fruit for God,"** he's calling us to act out of the covenant of love that we have with Christ in the same way we would in a marriage relationship. The love I have for my wife should bear fruit in that you should see evidence of it. My love for Karen should be evident in how I speak about her, in what I'm willing to do for her benefit, and in what I'm willing to not do in order to love, honor, and respect her. Love is never private: it always expresses itself tangibly in regard to the beloved.

Point of application then: what fruits of love are you bearing as the bride of Christ, your beloved? What have you been willing to give up for his sake? What are you doing that you wouldn't have otherwise done but for Christ you are willing to do it because you love him? Jesus isn't some impersonal savior who set you free from God's wrath so you could go on living like you did before: salvation is not a mere legal decree that declares you "not guilty." When Christ saves you he calls you into a relationship with himself, of love and thankfulness, and so your love for him should be expressed by bearing the fruits of love much like you would expect in a marriage relationship.

But as a further cause for motivation, Paul presents two sides of the coin in v. 5-6, reminding us of our past and pointing us to our situation in the present. So our first subpoint comes out of v. 5 which concerns....

a. Our past

Look at v. 5 now and notice how Paul calls us to consider our life before Christ. He writes, **"For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death."** Before Christ, all the law did for us is arouse our sinful passions. It didn't restrain us; it produced in us more sinful desires, a point Paul is going to elaborate on in more detail in the passage right after this. But I think the idea is like this: we're far more likely to break a rule when the rule is explicitly given than when it's not. For example, tell a child not to go into the cookie jar and take any cookies while you are taking a nap and suddenly, whereas the child hadn't given any thought to cookies previously, suddenly cookies are at the forefront of his mind and he begins to plot how he can quietly sneak a cookie while mom is asleep. Paul is saying the law works in the same way: by expressly forbidding something, it raises in us sinful desires to go ahead and do the very thing that ought not be done.

But Paul's point in this is to remind us of the end game of living our lives under the power of our sinful flesh and the law. He says all that did is **"bear fruit for death."** Jesus said that you will know a tree by its fruits: a good tree bears good fruits and a bad tree bears bad fruits. So if you're living according to your sinful passions, your words and actions will be sinful and serve as the fruits by which God will eventually judge you with the sentence of eternal death in hell. That's the end game. Keep

on sinning and living life for yourself and God will look at the fruit you bore and say "This is a bad tree. Throw it into the fire."

So Paul's saying in effect, "Why in the world would you even contemplate continuing in sin? Look where that led. Following your sinful desires resulted in spiritual death then and will result in eternal death later. Why would you voluntarily allow yourself to be enslaved to such a wretched condition now that you've been set free of it? It's a dead end so don't go back to it."

Do you hear that, my Christian brothers and sisters here at Grace Fellowship? Sin isn't your friend. It's not going to help you. It won't make you happy. It has not and never will bring you satisfaction and joy. All that following your sinful desires will do is bear fruit for death. Don't walk down that road any longer. You now belong to another and he has called you to bear the fruit of righteousness that flows out a love for him. So let's turn to the other side of the coin now, from our past to...

b. Our present

Follow along in your Bibles once more as I read v. 6. **"But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code."**

Since we died with Christ, we aren't under the law any longer, or to go back to the marriage analogy, we aren't married to it. We used to be obliged to the law in that we needed to obey it in order to please God. Do everything God says in the law and you will be declared righteous. But as Paul made clear in the first three chapters of Romans, none of us have done that. So all the law could do was condemn us because none of us could keep it.

But in Christ we are released from the law because Christ fulfilled it and then died and rose again so that he was free from his obligation to it. Therefore, when we trust in Christ, God reckons Christ's life and death to be our own so that we died with him and now live with them. We're released from our obligation to obey the law as a means of salvation because Christ did it for us.

But lest we misunderstand this, though we are dead to the law in terms of a way of gaining salvation, the law still reveals God's moral will for us, and so if we love Jesus and want to please him as his precious bride, then we'll want to look to the law as a way of expressing our love for him, not as a way to gain his favor - we died to that - but as an expression of our thankful joy for the love we already have.

The result of this then is we can now serve God not as Paul says, **"in the old way of the written code"** meaning my trying to obey the law in order to earn our salvation by our works, but rather we can serve him **"in the new way of the Spirit"** because we've been born again by the power of the Holy Spirit and can serve God in loving gratitude for all he has graciously done for us in Christ. Our approach to God is now radically different, much in the same way that loving our spouse is very different after

you get married than it was before you did. Back when I first started dating Karen, I did things to gain her love. I had to earn her affections, as it were. She wasn't going to marry me if I was an obnoxious jerk. I had to earn her respect and love for me so that on the day I asked her to marry me she would say yes and not, "Never in a million years!"

But now that we're married, I don't need to show her love in order to gain her love. I already have that. She has the ring on her finger. Mission accomplished. Now I love Karen because I appreciate her, I am thankful for her, I want to please her simply because I find joy in bringing her joy. I still express my love for her but for a different reason than when we first began dating.

So it is with God. You don't need to obey the law to gain God's favor anymore. God has already expressed his love for you in Christ. You are the bride of Christ through faith. In Christ you died to the law as a means of procuring God's favor. You now are free to love, serve, and obey God not to gain his favor but because you are so thankful for what he has already done to redeem you. God's Spirit has liberated you from the law as means to earn God's acceptance and instead freed you to love him as a grateful response to the love you already have.

Conclusion

So then, let me close by inviting you to make this evermore true in your life. You are the bride of Christ. He set you free from the law as a means of gaining God's favor. In Christ, you have God's favor, fully and freely. You no longer need to try to earn it. Christ has redeemed you from the penalty of the law and set his Spirit in you so you can know him and love him and serve him, the one who saved you. So live in that love. Don't go back to the sin that once controlled you and led only to death. Out of a heart of deep joy and thankfulness for what he has done, go and live for Christ. Say no to sin and yes to righteousness, not to earn his love, but because you already have it in its fullness right now, a love that will never leave you or forsake you. May such joyful gratitude for the love of Christ compel you to bear good fruits of righteousness for his sake, both now and forevermore. Let's pray.