

Dead to the Law

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Please turn in your Bibles to Romans 7. We'll begin in verse 1.

Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man. Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God. For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter. What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.

Romans 7:1-7

In reading these verses, many questions can come to mind. Is Paul talking about marriage, or is he talking about something even more important? What can he mean by saying we "are become dead to the law by the body of Christ?" What law is he talking about? And what does all of this have to do with bringing forth fruit unto God?

I would like to answer these questions this evening, and I would like to do so using three basic points. These three points are:

- 1) Although we were once under the reign of our old husband the law, we are now under the reign of our new husband, Jesus Christ.
- 2) Our change from being married to the law to being married to Christ brings about a change in the fruit we bear.

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3) With this change from the law to grace also comes a change in our motivation.

Point 1:

Although we were once under the reign of our old husband the law, we are now under the reign of our new husband, Jesus Christ

Let's go back and look at these verses in a little more detail:

Beginning with verse 1: "Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband."

Now, I think we all understand this. It simply means that when a woman marries, the law binds her to her husband. She is bound to her husband until death do them part. But when the husband dies, she is free from that law.

Continuing in verse 3: "So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man."

All this is saying is that you must not be married to two people at once, but when your mate dies, you can remarry.

And now we come to verse 4, which I consider to be the central point of the text: "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God."

Paul is speaking in terms we can easily understand. A law binds us only as long as we live. The law of our marriage vows is only "until death do us part." But Paul's focus is not marriage. Paul is not really trying to give us a lesson on marriage or marriage law here. He uses this only as an illustration. The apostle is trying to teach us something about our relationship to the law and our relationship to Christ. Notice verse 4 again: "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another,

even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.”

As shocking as it may sound, Paul is saying that by the dead body of Christ, we have become dead to the law, and we are now married to the living, resurrected Christ. Furthermore, Paul is saying that our relationship to the law and our relationship to Christ are mutually exclusive. We can't be married to both at the same time.

Before we go on, we must understand what law we are talking about. What law are we dead to? Does Paul mean that we are no longer under the ceremonial law only? Does he mean only that we are no longer to offer sacrifices, follow dietary restrictions, and observe new moons? Let's read on and see if Paul himself defines the law he is talking about.

In Romans 7, beginning with verse 5, we read, “For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held [What is dead? The law that held us]; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter. What shall we say then? Is the law sin? [No, Paul is not saying that the law is sin. The law can cause sin and death, but the law itself is not sin. So Paul says] God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law [The law lets us know what sin is—and now Paul is going to identify the law he is talking about]: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet” (Romans 7:5-7).

So what law is Paul talking about? What law are we dead to? If we are to be true to Scripture; if we are to let Scripture interpret itself, the conclusion is inescapable. Paul is not just talking about the ceremonial law. The law Paul is talking about, the law we are dead to, is the law that includes, “Thou shalt not covet.” Specifically, that is the Ten Commandments. “Thou shalt not covet” is the tenth of the Ten Commandments. Paul used the Tenth Commandment, “Thou shalt not covet,” as representative of the entire Ten Commandments. And the Ten Commandments are, of course, central to the entire body of Old Covenant law.

Let's look at something very quickly just to see that. It is in Deuteronomy 4:13. There are other Scriptures that support this, but let's look at this one in Deuteronomy 4:13: “And he declared unto you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, even ten

commandments; and he wrote them upon two tables of stone." We see here that the Ten Commandments on the two tables of stone are equated with the entire Old Covenant.

Okay, now we know what law Paul is talking about. But how have we become dead to the law by the body of Christ?

Many Scriptures tell us that we who are in Christ died with Him in his death and now live a new life with Him in His resurrection.

One such passage is found in Romans 6. Notice verses 5 and 6 of Romans chapter 6: "For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." So, what Paul is saying is that, when our old sinful self died with Christ, we were released from our servitude to sin. Now, what has this to do with being released from the law? What does being released from being the servants of sin have to do with being released from the law? Everything.

Turn to Romans 6, beginning with verse 14:

"For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace." Now notice this. This is an amazing Scripture. Paul is saying just the opposite of what someone might expect. He is saying that because we are not under the law, sin will not have dominion over us. And notice that this is not a command. Paul is not telling us to do something. He is not saying, Make sure sin does not have dominion over you. He is stating a fact. This is a promise. He is saying that sin will not have dominion over us, or rule us, because we are not under the law, but under grace. Being out from under the law and being under grace causes sin to lose its power over us.

Okay, continuing in Romans 6:15: "What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid." There is the question that a lot of people would ask. Shall we sin because we are not under the law? Does being out from under the law mean that sin will now reign? "Let it not be so," as the Greek says for what is translated "God forbid" in the King James Version. In fact, as we will see, and as Paul just hinted in the previous verse, the situation is just the opposite.

Let's go on to verse 16 of Romans 6: "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" What is Paul saying here? He is saying that there are two forms of servitude, and everyone is either under the one or the other. We are either servants of sin unto death or we are servants of obedience unto righteousness. In Romans 16:26, Paul uses the phrase, "the obedience of faith." In Romans 3:27, he uses a similar term, "the law of faith." Perhaps you have heard of the Lordship controversy and people who talk about "cheap grace." The question is over whether, once we have expressed faith in Jesus as our Savior, we must then obey Him as Lord. Well, the Bible doesn't even allow for such a division. Faith or belief in Jesus is the same as obedience to Him. Let's keep reading.

Romans 6:17-18: "But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness." They were the servants of sin but they were freed from that because they obeyed "the form of doctrine which was delivered to" them. What is the "form of doctrine"? John Gill explains: "By 'the form of doctrine', is meant the Gospel, which is the 'doctrine' of the Scriptures, of Christ and his apostles, and is sound and according to godliness; and is a 'form', or contains a summary and compendium of truths." So, obeying the form of doctrine is the same as believing the Gospel. And this, then, delivered them from bondage to sin. What happened then? They became the servants of righteousness. I want to explain that this is really the same concept as we started off with in Romans 7. They became dead to the law and married to Christ.

Now he continues in verses 19-20: "I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness. For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness." That's an odd concept, isn't it? But it is true. Before we became Christians, we were free from righteousness. We didn't serve it at all, did we? We served sin.

Verses 21-23 of Romans 6: "What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our

Lord." We are freed from sin to become the servants of righteousness which bears the fruit, or free gift, of eternal life. The context then brings us right to where we started in Romans 7 where Paul explains that we are dead to the law and married to Christ.

The Baptist preacher, Gilbert Beebe, wrote in 1869: "There are but few lessons in the gospel, which the saints have been more slow to learn and fully comprehend, than that of our release from the law, and marriage to Christ." ("Loosed From the Law" <http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/loosedlaw.html>)

The law was a terrible husband. He put righteous demands on us, but gave us no ability. He gave us no righteousness. All he did was strengthen sin. The more laws there are, the more chances we have to sin because we don't really have the ability to keep the law. And the law can even cause us to want to sin. I remember seeing a hidden camera video with little children. They put some toddlers into a room filled with toys. They told them they could play with any of the toys they wanted except one ball that they put off by itself. And then the adults left the room. And you could see on the camera that the first thing those kids did was look at that ball. Then one got up and just touched it with the tip of her finger. Then another got up and moved it a little. And then another just grabbed it and started playing with it. It was Adam and Eve all over again.

Let's go back to Romans 7, verse 7 again and read through verse 9. "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died."

Notice what Hebrews 8 says. Hebrews 8:7-10: "For if that first covenant [that is, the covenant of the law given at Mt. Sinai, the Old Covenant] had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with [the law? No] them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their

mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people." The fault is in us. In our natural state, we are unable to keep the law. So the law does not keep us from sin. The law shows us what sin is and actually revives sin. Look at Romans 3:20. Romans 3:20: "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin." That external law on the tables on stone only tells us, You're a dirty, rotten sinner.

Let's read Galatians 3:19: "Wherefore then serveth the law? [What's its purpose?] It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator." The purpose of the law was not to justify or make us righteous. And notice that it was added only until the seed should come to whom the promise was made, and that is Jesus Christ. And He has come.

Look at 1 Corinthians 15:55-57: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Is the law the strength of righteousness? No. The law is the strength of sin. It brings out the works of the flesh. The victory comes through Jesus Christ.

We sing a song in our hymnal that goes like this:

Free from the law — O happy condition!
Jesus hath bled, and there is remission;
Cursed by the law and bruised by the fall,
Grace hath redeemed us once for all.

And once for all should mean once for all. Paul wanted to make sure that the Galatians understood it was once for all. We are dead to the law and must not try to go back.

Let's read Galatians 5:1. In Galatians 5:1, Paul writes, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." What is the yoke of bondage that Paul has in mind? If we look at the surrounding verses and chapters in Galatians, we very quickly see that Paul is writing about the law. The law is the yoke of bondage. For example, in Galatians 5:4, we read, "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace." That is, Paul was saying that we cannot depend on both the law and

grace to justify us. It is one or the other, and only one is going to work. And the choice of which one it should be is made clear in Galatians 2:16. In Galatians 2:16 Paul writes, "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."

Paul contrasts law and grace. If we are under the law, we are in bondage to sin. If we are under grace, we are free. But how do we become free from the law? We are freed by the death of Christ because He fulfilled the law in every way for us. He kept the law perfectly for us, He fulfilled all of its types and shadows and prophecies, and He suffered God's wrath and died to pay the penalty for our sins. Not one jot or one tittle passed from the law till all was fulfilled. We could not rightfully be married to Christ until our marriage to the law ended through our death in Christ. We, who have been in Christ from before the foundation of the world, as Ephesians 1:4 says, died with Him when He died. With the resurrection of Christ, we rose as new creatures, the Bride of Christ. The church could not be legally wedded to Christ in the New Covenant relation until every jot and tittle of the law was fulfilled. The marriage of the Lamb could not be legalized until the Old Covenant lawfully ended by death. As a woman who has a living husband cannot be married to another man without involving the guilt of adultery, so neither can we be married to Christ until we first become fully dead to the law. Such a union would be unlawful and adulterous.

We must not try to commit spiritual adultery by trying to go back to our old husband. As Gilbert Beebe says in the same article I cited earlier, "Our dead husband never blessed, but always cursed us. Our living husband always blesses and never curses. The former required everything, but furnished nothing; but the latter furnishes everything freely, and demands nothing in payment. Then let us with cheerful hearts love, honor and obey him in all things, and never seek another lover."

But there are many who would bring us back under the law. We must be careful. Many of the Presbyterian and Puritan writers, although they rightfully teach the Doctrines of Grace, also confuse the Old and New Covenants, saying that the New Covenant is merely a new administration of the Old Covenant. This is how they say that infant sprinkling is right, because they say that it is the "New Administration's" form of Old Covenant circumcision.

Our theology should be from the Bible. It should be New Covenant oriented, for this is what the Bible teaches. It should be New Covenant Theology. This is the theology that Baptists, Anabaptists, and their predecessors have had for centuries. They understood what the early Baptists called the distinction of the covenants. This is brought out very clearly in Galatians 4.

Now let us look at Galatians 4, verses 21-24:

Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar [or Hagar].

Paul uses this allegory to drive home the point that the Old Covenant was a covenant of bondage to the law. When the people at Sinai told God that they would do all He said, they were binding themselves to the law. Ishmael, the son of Hagar the bondmaid, was "born after the flesh." That is, he was the product of Sarah's faithless idea to produce the heir God had promised. Instead of waiting on God in faith, she told Abraham to have sexual relations with Hagar. In other words, it was an idea based on human works rather than on genuine faith. Isaac, on the other hand, was the true son of Sarah, the freewoman. He was the product of God's promise. He was born despite the fact that Sarah and Abraham would normally be considered to be too old to produce a child. Paul goes on to explain that Hagar, the bondmaid, corresponds to Mount Sinai, the place where God gave the law to the Israelites, establishing the Old Covenant.

As Paul says, in Galatians 4:25-27, "For this [Hagar] is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband." The Old Covenant is the covenant of bondage, the covenant that bound the Jews (called Jerusalem in these verses). It is the covenant of law-keeping and faithless works. But Christians, as was Isaac, are the children of the free woman (Sarah) and of promise. We are the

children of the Jerusalem that is above. This Jerusalem that is above is the Gospel church right now as it is under the administration of the New Covenant. We are under the New Covenant, the covenant of faith and of resting in Christ for our salvation.

Verse 28-31: "Now we, brethren," Paul continues, "as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free."

We Christians are not the children of the law, or Old Covenant, but we are the children of the Gospel believed through faith by grace. That is why we must never mix the Old Covenant and the New Covenant together as one supposed covenant of grace. To say that the Old Covenant was a covenant of grace is total confusion; it was a covenant of works and of bondage. Only the New Covenant is a covenant of grace and of freedom.

Point 2:

Our change from being married to the law to being married to Christ brings about a change in the fruit we bear

Let us look again at Romans 6:20-22: "For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life." Before, we were bearing fruit for death. Now, we are bearing fruit for everlasting life.

Now notice Gal. 5:13-25:

For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the

flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

I want to explain here that, although sin no longer has dominion over us, no longer rules us completely, we are still flesh and blood and we do still have a battle. Then verse 18 says, "But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law." The law and the Spirit are contrary to one another in that the law brings out the lusts of the flesh, but the Spirit leads to love.

Continuing in verse 19:

Now the works of the flesh [that is, those works that are strengthened by the law] are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit [that is, what we bear as a result of our relationship with our new husband] is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

Look again at Romans 7:4: "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God." Under the law, we could not bring forth fruit unto God. The ending of our marriage to the law and our new marriage to Christ are absolutely necessary to bring forth fruit to God. Notice that the law blocks our bearing fruit to God.

Romans 7:5-6: "For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter."

Point 3:
With this change from the law to grace also comes a change in our motivation

There is a change from what we were to what we are now. We can bear fruit only because of this change. We were controlled by the sinful nature. This prevented our bearing fruit to God. We were in the flesh working the motions of sin by the law. This was true of all of us. When we were in the flesh, we were unregenerate. If we had any thought of being moral, we were motivated by self-righteousness, which is in itself sin. But this is not true of us any more if we are believers. Are you a believer? Then you are no longer in the flesh but in the Spirit. Remember Jesus' words to Nicodemus in John 3:6: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Scripture brings out this point time and again. This is why it is so foolish to try to return to your old husband, the law, which is after the flesh, to try to find out how to live in the Spirit. That old husband can't do that. The Spirit is not his realm. In the spirit realm, he is like a fish out of water. His realm was when we were in the flesh to work the fruits of death in our members, as Romans 7:5 says.

How is it possible to bear fruit to God now? There is a change in what controls us. When we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our body. This is the effect of the law on the person who is in the flesh. It provokes sin. That is why you will never change anybody's nature by imposing laws on him. The laws of the land may keep a society under restraint for fear of punishment, but they do not change the nature of the people. It is not the law that changed your nature. Don't ever think the law changed you or changes you now. The law only inflamed our sinful nature. Now we are free to serve our living husband, Jesus Christ, motivated by love, not fear of punishment or self-righteousness.

The law of love is called the law of Christ. Galatians 6:2 tells us to "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." Jesus called it a new commandment in John 13:34: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." This is further broken down into many other commandments, some of which are the realities of what was only typified or foreshadowed in the Ten Commandments and other Old Testament commands.

Under the Old Covenant, the law could only condemn. Paul wrote in Galatians 3:10, "For as many as are of the works of the law are under

the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." Those under the Old Covenant had to obey the law perfectly or die. Under the New Covenant, the law never condemns. It does not bring death. It has no such death penalty associated with it. New Covenant law is simply the way we Christians live, walking in the Spirit.

Hear this wonderful news from Paul in Romans 8:1-4: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh [our flesh], God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

As Jesus Christ said in John 8:36, "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."

To state my three points very quickly again:

- 1) We were under the reign of our old husband the law, but now we are under the reign of our new husband, Jesus Christ.
- 2) Our change from being married to the law to being married to Christ enables us to change from the works of the flesh to bearing the fruit of the Spirit.
- 3) With the change from law to grace our motivation changes from fear and self-righteousness to love.

Remember, Romans 5:20 says that the law was added that the offense might abound. If you are still in the flesh, you cannot help but sin. You cannot escape it. But if you are in Jesus Christ, if He is your Savior, then you are dead to the law and married to Christ. You are now free under the New Covenant to serve Jesus Christ in love and bring forth fruit without any fear of condemnation.