

Dead to Law, Alive in Christ

Romans 7:1-6

*...You have also died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may **belong** to another...*

Introduction: In the 1954 novel called *Lord of the Flies*, author William Golding explored themes of the breakdown of societal norms, savagery, and the inherent capacity of humanity for evil. Or to put it in Biblical terms, he looked at how our **depraved nature** is displayed when there are no constraints. If you know the story, it follows a group of school age boys (ages 6-12) who evacuated England during war but were shot down and stranded on an island. What started as an attempt at order and hierarchy with young Ralph voted as the leader and Jack as head of the hunting party, quickly broke down to a form of anarchy, with factions, lack of responsibility and brutality. The culmination of the book is the hunting party turning on those who tried to impose order, killing young Piggie, Ralph's right hand confidant, and burning the jungle to try to kill Ralph. Just as they were about to kill Ralph, they were rescued by a Naval ship and officer, who was appalled at what he saw before him, with a level of savagery that should not be experienced by boys. As they boys cry, the officer looks back at the war ship he had just come from.

Perhaps I'm drawn to that story since I was once a 10-year-old boy who would day dream about that kind of scenario: no parents, and doing *whatever I wanted*, but more than that, this story captures the essence of the human condition. By birth, we want **self-autonomy**, believe we have the right of **self-deification**, and naturally **rebel** against anything that stands in our way. This is exactly the reason why every culture and society lays out **rules and laws**, to account for the sin nature of all its inhabitants. It's exactly why every child needs **rules and boundaries**, because left to ourselves, we will break down to a base level and be miserable. Have you ever seen a child who got *everything they wanted at Disneyland at the end of the day*? When we were first married we had neighbors who wanted to "*never tell their son 'no'*", which meant their young son was not only constantly *misbehaving*, *but he was also miserable*.

Laws, then, are needed so that people do not break down to doing whatever they want, since history has multiple examples of this, including the reason why God destroyed the world with a flood in **Genesis 6**. *Why did God do it?* Because the thoughts and intentions of mankind's hearts had created a state of great wickedness on the earth. Efforts in our own culture to get rid of police or to refuse to enforce laws of the land are a recipe for **anarchy and lawlessness**, which are ALWAYS a blight on any culture and society. So laws are good and needed, and they do a few things:

1. **They RESTRAIN evil** – What would happen if you left a group of 10-12-year-old boys in your house for a few days without supervision? What would happen if there was no speed limit on the 405 or 118? What would happen if there was no recourse for stealing, or vandalism, or murdering?
2. **They REVEAL sin, or the need for law** – People can break the law out of confusion (I did not know I was not supposed to drive that fast in that neighborhood) or ignorance (I did not see that sign, officer), but mostly we break the law out of **rebellion**. We want to go faster, have what want, and not have **someone else make the rules for us**.
3. **They REVEAL the nature of the law giver** – Laws of any land reveal something about WHO made the laws, what they value, and that nature of their character.

This overlays well with **God's Law** that is laid out in the Old Testament as part of the Old Covenant of Moses. We know that the Law of the LORD is **perfect** (Ps. 19:7) and holy, and anyone who delights in it is blessed (Ps. 1:2). God's law is written on everyone's heart (Rom. 2:15), helping us know and see the difference between right and wrong. But God's law is good BUT LIMITED. In Romans, Paul continues to explore that intended limitation:

- The law **reveals sin**, but cannot remove it; it can give the knowledge of sin, but cannot redeem or justify (Rom. 3:19-20)
- The law is **holy and righteous** but cannot **make US holy and righteous**
- By itself, it cannot sanctify apart from Christ, but rather **increases sin** (Rom. 5:20)

Paul wanted the church at Rome and us to understand our relationship to the Law of God because it is the difference of living a life of **joy, love, and holiness** vs. one that continues to try to gain all of this on our own. Have you ever been frustrated that you cannot overcome a certain sin? Or you feel like your life as a Christian is not progressing? Or that you view your life in Christ as a series of lists, do's and don'ts, rather than a vibrant relationship? If that is you AT ALL, this chapter in Romans is vital for you to understand.

A QUICK REVIEW – If you have NOT been with us the last few months, or just joining us after Easter, or have forgotten altogether, let's do a quick overview of where we've been. Paul started by establishing the fact that **all of us** ---- everyone for all time, everywhere ---- violated God's law and character in **rebellion**, and thus stand condemned under His wrath. We are worthy of eternal punishment, and deserve everything we get since we ALL fell short of His glory. There was NOTHING that we could do to gain back, earn, or make-up for our sin, and any attempt was vanity. Most people get tripped up right here in life, thinking that they are **good** (ish) and **moral** (ish), or at least not as bad as most, and thus will be saved or NOT punished in the end. But all of our attempts only reveal our inability and weakness (Rom. 3:20-21).

So where did that leave us? Only waiting our sentencing. It was here that the fresh, life-giving air of **the grace of God in Jesus Christ entered in**. We needed someone to take our place, One that could fulfill all righteousness, and giving us His righteousness, so that we could be made righteous. This is exactly what Jesus did, by **imputing His righteousness to us** so that God could see our sinful life but still **declare us righteous**, with a foreign righteousness we could not earn. The only way to GET this is by **faith, by repenting and believing in Jesus'** death and resurrection. When this happens, we get a new righteousness from Him, meaning we are now changed or **transformed**, given a new heart, new love, new motives, and newfound holiness. This comes through a **uniting with Christ** in His death and resurrection, moving from our uniting with Adam to Christ.

This **transforming justification**, then, leads necessarily to **sanctification**, or a progress in Christ toward becoming more like Him in holiness. The more we are with Him, the more we take on the family resemblance. Where we once were **slaves of sin**, we are now **slaves of righteousness and God**. Our lives are NOT our own, but we are now wholly devoted to Christ. We have choices NOT to sin and to obey, freedom we never experienced in the prison of sin. **But what do we do with the law? What do we do with this nagging and comprehensive edifice over us?** That is what Paul tackles next in detail.

The Principle: The Law's reach (7:1)

*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?***

Look back at the immediate context to understand the continued case Paul builds: ***“But now you have been set free from sin and become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.”*** (6:22). Being set free from sin means we can choose to become more like Jesus, since the **power and penalty** of sin has been broken. Remember, Paul did not have chapter breaks in his original letter, so he picks this up with a discussion on the law, and assumes his readers know what he is referring to.

The **principle** is simple. As long as a person is alive, they are bound by the law. This is not intended to be tricky or complex, but logical. If you are born in the city of Simi Valley, you are *bound* by the law of the land, including city, county, State, and Federal law. But once we die, we are no longer under that law: no one can imprison me or fine me in death. The SAME applies to God’s law. We are ALL born UNDER the law of God, whether we acknowledge it or not. We are united in Adam’s birth and sin, and thus are responsible for our own sin. Because of our sin nature, we violate God’s law, both by ignorance (but betrayed by nature), or open rebellion. The only way out of the law is death. **Paul takes time to illustrate this point next:**

The Picture: *The Law’s restriction (7:2-3)*

*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. 3 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*

Marriage is a design of God, a gift to humanity, NOT a mere social construct. In Hebrew and Roman culture, there were laws for marriage, including those for divorce. Now, Paul is NOT giving a discourse on divorce and remarriage here, so we should not engage in a lengthy discussion HERE about what constitutes either one (though there is definite merit in having that at some point). But marriage is understood universally as a **covenant relationship**, one that **binds two with each other**. Notice the language here on “bound” and “released”, “alive” and “dies”, and “free from that law”. The point is this: no matter the type of relationship a wife has with a husband, she is bound, BY LAW, to that husband, and the only way out of that LAW is if he dies. If she were to leave her husband and marry/join herself to another, she would be committing **adultery**. But if he dies, she is free to marry another.

Paul is going to pick up two parts of this picture to make his ultimate point: 1) death frees us from the law; 2) Freedom from the law allows us to join to another

The Point: *The Law’s release (7:4-6)*

*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**. 5 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**. 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*

Now, notice that the analogy or picture switches just a bit. Consistently in the picture, you’d expect Paul to say the Law would have to die, but that is not what he does. Instead, in our **unification with Christ**, WE ARE THE ONES who have died to the law. This, then, is synonymous with our death to sin. We are united with Him in His death and resurrection (Rom. 6:5), and thus our OLD SELF is crucified with Him, and we are no longer slaves to sin. But we are not left as **lawless people**, but are now primed to be a loving people ---- which we will see.

So the big question that Paul answers here is this: ***if a believer who is justified in Jesus Christ is DEAD to the LAW, what role does he now have to the law?*** Let's answer this in two main ways: 1) The limitation of the law for a believer, 2) the fulfillment and practice of the law in Christ.

The LIMITATION of the law:

Galatians 3:23-25 *"Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. 24 So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. 25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian"*

The law functioned as a guardian or supervisor, a school master that was designed for the lawless (1 Tim. 1:9), not the just, and was supposed to reveal to all mankind that they **could not keep the law**, but continually violated it. The Law was good, but it was not designed to save, but push us by faith to God Himself. In the OT, God designed the sacrificial system to cover the sins of those who sought it, but the blood of goats and lambs could ONLY cover for a time, demanding more and more death (Heb. 10:4) Any attempt to please God by the Law alone fell flat, and any sacrifice was temporary. The **guardian** of the law did its work, to push people by faith to long for a better sacrifice, a better Savior.

Now look at how Paul showed the limitation of the law back in Romans 7. First, he mentions that while **"we were in the flesh"**, which is a way of saying 'in our unredeemed state' before Christ and justification. This is the state everyone starts in, the one where they are dead in their trespasses and sin (Eph. 2:1-3). While in this state, the law: 1) **aroused our sinful passions** – which means that it continually revealed our rebellious condition. Yes, we may have kept SOME of the law, the ones that suited us or made sense to us, but could not nor did we want to keep all, including loving the Lord with all of our heart. The law went against our favorite person and god --- US; 2) **The fruit produced was death** – all of our good works or attempts at righteousness, on our own, were mere 'filthy rags' (Isa 64:6); 3) **The law kept us captive** – we were imprisoned, unable to scale the wall or tunnel under the gate. 4) **The law could only work on the EXTERNAL, an old way that was a WRITTEN CODE** – NO LAW can change a heart and one CANNOT legislate morality that derives from the heart. This is why we as parents cannot cause salvation for our kids merely by having them obey, nor can I force anyone to truly change. I wish we could. But any attempt smacks of manipulation or legalism --- both of which are opposite of the gospel.

The Believers' RELEASE from the law

Now, if you've hung with this so far, good for you, since now it gets really good. Look back at verses 4-6 again. Note the words 'so that' and 'in order that' in verse 4. When you study your Bible and see these phrases, big flashing lights should go off in your mind, as they typically show **purpose or intention**. When we are united WITH or IN Christ, we simultaneously DIE to the law, since it CANNOT condemn us anymore, since the penalty and power of sin has been broken. But what is the result of that death, or what is the purpose? That we now **BELONG to another** (picking back up on the marriage analogy), being now joined with or married to Christ! Since we belong to Christ and not under the law, we can now **bear fruit for God** (rather than death)! And according to verse 6, we can do this in a **new way, through the Spirit**, which is done out of freedom and joy, **New relationship, new fruit, new way**. This is the good news of the gospel. But let's take it one step further and explain **how we do this**, and let's look at a **New covenant, a new law, and new marriage**.

NEW COVENANT: Jesus said something amazing in the upper room as He blessed the Passover meal, pouring the wine for the disciples: *"This cup that is poured out for you is the NEW COVENANT in my*

blood" (Luke 22:20). What was this NEW THING that was inaugurated with Jesus' death? The promise given by God to Israel narrowly and then broadly to the whole church:

Jeremiah 31:31-34 *"Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a **new covenant** with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, 32 **not like the covenant that I made with their fathers** on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, **though I was their husband**, declares the Lord. 33 For **this is the covenant** that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: **I will put my law within them**, and I will write it on their **hearts**. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34 And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. **For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.**"*

What was this new covenant and why was it needed? Because NO ONE could keep the Old One, so something new HAD to come. The hallmarks of this New Covenant:

1. **A law written on the heart, NOT EXTERNALLY given** – this would be a result of a new heart (Ezek. 36:26) and would give God's people the ABILITY to obey out of their love for God. This will be a covenant given by God Himself, not earned by people
2. **There will be an intimate relationship between God and His people as a result** – *not one constantly strained by the power of the Law* (see Heb. 8:10-11)
3. **Forgiveness will be complete, not temporary** – Since the blood of goats and sheep could only deal with sin temporarily, a once for all sacrifice was needed to offer complete forgiveness – which was realized in the death of Jesus (Heb. 10:10, 12)
4. **The Holy Spirit is given to empower each believer** – This was not seen directly in Jeremiah, but clearly stated in Ezekiel 36:27, *"I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules"*

Was this given for us, the church? YES! Not only did Jesus say it was for all believers in the upper room, but 2 Cor. 3 says all believers are given **new covenant ministry**, not of the letter but the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:4-6). This means that attaining to obedience is no longer a mere **external action**, but one empowered by God from a new, redeemed heart and the power of the Holy Spirit, who guides us in truth and convicts us of sin (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13)

New LAW – Since we have DIED TO THE LAW, we do not approach the law the same way we did BEFORE justification. This is so important. We did not earn salvation through the law, nor do we gain sanctification merely from the law! Why?! Because we have a new view of the law:

Romans 13:8-10 *"Owe no one anything, except to love each other, **for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.** 9 For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 10 **Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.***

Galatians 5:14 *"For the **whole law is fulfilled** in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*

Galatians 5:18 *"But if you are led by the Spirit, **you are not under the law.**"*

Galatians 5:22-23 *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; **against such things there is no law**”* (cf. Gal. 6:2; 1 Cor. 9:21)

What is the new part of the law for us? Not a law written down full of lists, but rather what we are called to do out of a new heart, primarily **LOVE**. Loving the Lord with our whole heart is not only the greatest commandment, but it is impossible until we have a new one (Matt. 22:37-38) When we desire to love God and our neighbor, we will desire to do the others, NOT to earn but out of a right motivation to love. Love for God and others becomes the goal and motivation for keeping the law. Our love for God BECAUSE of His love for us fulfills the law. But there is one more level we must understand to truly serve in a new way.

New Marriage Relationship – Jesus presents Himself to us as our bridegroom, and we as His bride (Eph. 5:25). In this relationship, we are called to bear fruit that pleases the Lord. This fruit includes good works prepared for us beforehand (Eph. 2:9-10), walking in a manner worthy of the Lord and increasing in our knowledge of Him (Col. 1:10), and yielding to the leading of the Spirit by being Scripture saturated as He produces fruit in us (Gal. 5:22-23). All of this fruit is a result of true, faith-driven **repentance** (Matt. 3:8), and all of it will be recognizable (Matt. 7:20). But ALL of this is ONLY possible through ONE RELATIONSHIP:

John 15:5 *“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, **for apart from me you can do nothing**”*

John 15:10-11 *“If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and **abide in his love**. 11 These things I have spoken to you, **that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full**”*

John 15:16-17 *“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and **bear fruit and that your fruit should abide**, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. 17 **These things I command you, so that you will love one another**.*

Marriage, the best of marriage, is when there is mutual love, and thus mutual service and sacrifice. No marriage is healthy or thrives when it is a *quid pro quo* experience, or a list of things we are supposed to DO for each other alone. No, a marriage thrives when we are motivated out of LOVE to NOT do anything to hurt or wound, and DO anything for the best of the other. We do not walk on egg shells with a loving spouse, since we know that even if we sin and fall short, we will be forgiven, loved, and restored. A loving spouse will listen to us, counsel us, confront us, and comfort us. There is **security, motivation, and delight** in this kind of relationship.

It is here that I believe we fall short in our walk of the Christian life: whenever we try to DO anything apart from an active union, pursuit, and abiding in Christ. Apart from Him, we can do nothing! Why are we unable to stop our habits of sin? Because we are trying to do it by the OLD LAW, merely doing it externally. Why are we feeling stagnant, or unmotivated, or bored? Because we are NOT walking in intimacy with the Lord! Do you know the surefire way I feel the closest with Erin? When I determine out of love and joy to spend time with her, pursue her, listen to her, and embrace her. What is the surefire way to feel frustrated and discontent in my marriage with her? Be exhilarated and enamored with anything else. The same is true with Christ. **We have all that we need for life and godliness**, but we cannot do it through OLD MEANS, but only through Him, the Spirit, and out of new hearts. So we ABIDE in Christ, pursuing Him and others in love, and thus fulfill the law.