

Dead to Law, Alive in Christ *Part 2*

Romans 7:1-6

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

Introduction: One of the blessings of being a pastor is the opportunity to officiate weddings, a ceremony that is one of the sweetest worship services ever when two believers commit to a covenant relationship of love before God and their dearest friends. One of the joys within that joy is to meet with the couple before for **pre-marital counseling**, which involves understanding marriage Biblically, counting the cost, and going into marriage wide eyed, vetting out all of the pre-conceived ideas of it, both right and short-sighted. One of the areas that we talk about toward the end and heading into the ceremony itself is writing or picking out **vows**, promises that will be made at the altar to each other and witnessed by all who are there for the food and cake. Vows are fascinating since they are NOT commanded (but if you DO make a vow, you need to fulfill it – Ecclesiastes 5:4-5), but are *recommended*. Now, most people cannot remember their vows word for word, but they involve similar promises: *chastity, commitment through hard and easy, trust, honor, respect, listening, etc.* But the main commitment summarizing all of these vows is the vow to **love** (or be a loving wife and husband). We would say the promise to love in your wedding ceremony dictates the next million decisions to love for the rest of the marriage.

Now, vows are good but not ultimate. You may or may not remember your vows specifically (or did not even have them!), but the point of the vow was NOT to focus on the vow or particular vows, but the **reason** you made them. In other words, the reason we make a vow or set of promises is because we **love our spouse**, and thus express that love through commitment. It does NOT work the other way around. That is why we don't fixate on the vows but on loving. You may actually be able to check off a list of the vows you made and miss the point ---- where a spouse is NOT loved ---- and thus fail to fulfill the vows as a whole.

This is small picture of role of the law in the life of a believer. The law is good when it plays its role in our love for Christ, but just keeping the law does not mean we are fulfilling the point of the law: **to love Christ and others. This is why Paul stated in Romans 7:1** that we have **to die to the law**, so that we can be made alive and **BELONG to another**, and that is Christ! What may seem a bit confusing is one of the most beautiful and life giving realities of the Christian life. For a **quick review**, last week we looked at the fact that Paul said that the **law was only binding while someone lived, but death frees from the law, which allows us to join with another.**

This morning we will dig into the **benefits and FREEDOM of dying to the Law**. This is the difference between failure, frustration, and death, and life, freedom, and joy.

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***

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. The **guardian** of the law did its work, to push people by faith to long for a better sacrifice, a better Savior.

- 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)

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. 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.

Trying to get to Christ through the law alone, whether to be justified OR sanctified, is a **joyless, fruitless, frustrating, vain pursuit**. It’s like trying to get out of an ESCAPE ROOM through a door that is locked up by a complicating web of different combination locks. Each lock states a different law: *do not commit adultery, do not covet, do not steal, etc.* You are at first hopeful, since it does not seem that difficult to unlock each one. But as you try to click each into place, even when progress appears to be made, they won’t open, and if they do, as you move on to another, the previous one locks again. Frustration sets in, especially as you gaze behind and realize there are more complex locks that say “love the Lord God with ALL of your heart, strength, and mind”. As it gets more and more frustrating, someone comes to you and offers to bring you around another door, but the caveat is that He must carry you. For all those that gave up trying to undo the locks on their own, they were lovingly carried to the other side. But all those that wanted to continue on their own, they kept trying and trying on their own, even through failure and anger, they would not yield their own ability to fix the problem on their own, until time finally ran out.

This is the problem with the Law...IT CANNOT save or sanctify without Jesus, and even those who initially believed in Jesus to save them as their Lord and Savior have reverted back to the locks instead of loving, resting in, enjoying, and savoring their relationship with Him. It has led to **joyless effort, fruitless existence, and frustrated work**. This is why we are dead to the Law, which makes us alive to Christ.

The Believers' RELEASE from the law

Note back in the text, now, that there are **three distinct differences and effects** of being dead to the law and alive in Christ. **1) We BELONG to the ONE who has raised from the dead** (4), meaning we are no longer under the condemnation of the Law, but married to Christ; **2) We can now BEAR FRUIT for God**, instead of producing the fruit of death produced by the Law alone (4); **3) We can BEGIN to serve in a new way, through the Spirit**, rather than by a written code (6). But the question is: **how do we do this apart from the Law, since we are not lawless?** What is given to us to be able to do these things? The answer is a **NEW COVENANT, a NEW ORIENTATION TO THE LAW, and a NEW UNION in Christ.**

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). We are given a heart transplant (see Ezek. 11:19) in order that we may KNOW HIM PERSONALLY and thus fulfill the true Law (Matt. 7:21-23)
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"*

This all was instituted at the *shedding of Jesus' blood on the cross*, as He told us during the Passover meal with His disciples (Luke 22:20), a New Covenant in His blood. When Paul was questioned about his credentials in **2 Corinthians 3**, he took time to compare the *outward commendations* that his accusers had --- diplomas and letters of commendation --- to the ones that he had: *the transformed lives and hearts of his disciples, showing something that could not merely happen with external means, pressure,*

or force (3:3). He then used that as a launching point to talk about the merits of the New Covenant to true believers:

2 Cor. 3:4-6 – *“Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. 5 Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, 6 who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a **new covenant**, not of the **letter but of the Spirit**. **For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life**”*

What was the letter that killed? The written Law, written on stone and given to Moses (7). Far from lacking glory, this written Law was glorious and made Moses face shine so that people could not look at him, forcing him to veil his face. But this law was part of a ministry of death, of condemnation (8), and had a natural end (11) when Christ came! As long as people gaze into the OLD covenant, it's as if there is a veil over their heart (15), and their minds are hardened, still trying to unlock the locks on their own. What changes:

2 Cor. 3:16-18 *“But when one turns to the Lord, **the veil is removed**. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being **transformed** into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit”*

And what is the point of the Law and salvation?!?!

2 Cor. 4:6 *“For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God **in the face of Jesus Christ**.”*

What is the foundational reality of the New Covenant? That we can now **see Christ, see Him clearly, His glory and goodness**. The culmination of the Law is Christ, and the point of salvation is Christ, and the goal of our life is Christ. That sets the tone for our lives in a new orientation toward the Law.

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 5:22-24 *“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**” And those who **BELONG** to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (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.**

One more way Jesus Himself illustrated this. In John 13, at the culmination of the upper room and before heading to the cross, said something unique: “**A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.**” (13:34-35). The question we ask: *how was this “NEW”*, since it had already been commanded, in the law, in **Deut. 6:5 and Lev. 19:18**. Notice two important ways. 1) **It meant a new, sacrificial love that was modeled in Jesus Himself**. Love was no longer merely an external act, but out of a heart of sacrifice, willing to suffer and lay down one’s life for another, even an enemy. 2) **It is now possible because it was produced by the New Covenant!** What do we mean by that?

Jesus knew the disciples could not fulfill this law on their own, even though the requirement was clear: “*If you love me, you will keep my commandments*” (John 14:15). What was needed was help, or to say it another way, a HELPER to be with us forever (John 14:16). What is the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of every believer? More vibrant singing and emotion driven responses? By no means. The role of the Holy Spirit in our lives is ABUNDANTLY CLEAR:

- **To dwell in us and with us, and guide us in the TRUTH** (John 14:17)
- **To be a HELPER to teach us and help us remember all that Christ said** (John 14:26)
- **To bear witness, testify, and point us to Christ** (John 15:26)
- **To bring comfort and conviction of sin** (John 16:7-8)
- **To guide us in all TRUTH, and glorify Christ** (John 16:13-14)

Jesus said it was to OUR ADVANTAGE that HE leaves, so the Spirit could come! It is the guidance of the Spirit through the knowledge of God’s Word that allows us to **LOVE CHRIST, and thus keep His commandments**. This now creates the source of how we can **bear fruit for God as believers, which is getting to the heart of this new relationship with God in Christ**.

NEW BELONGING IN A MARRIAGE TO CHRIST – 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.**

Why is this so important? Because if we try to have fruit produced in us apart from the work of the Spirit or union with Christ, it will become merely an exercise of **fruit stapling or putting tinsel on the Charlie Brown tree**. A vineyard that has branches reaching across a field that are severed from the grounded vine will wither and die. One could fool people for a while by going to the store and getting ripe grapes and stapling them to the vines, but that will only do for a short time before raisins are formed. And this is no knocking the tinsel people, but we usually veil a dry and misshapen tree under the glitter of tinsel, but take the shine away, and all you have is a dead tree. **THIS IS WHAT TRYING TO BE SAVED OR SANCTIFIED APART FROM CHRIST IS!** People can fool all of the people some of the time, by going to church, or taking a class, or showing up to serve once in a while, or treating their spouse nicely in public, but all the attempts at pleasing God through severed works are only good to be gathered up and burned. This is why **marriage to Christ** is an apt picture of the Christian life.

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.

How do I grow and move from frustrated, old, and fruitless efforts? I attach myself to the vine and orientate my whole life to **loving Christ, being satisfied in Him, delighting in Him, and resting in Him**. We stop pointing to the law alone for a sign of maturity and look to our deepening affection and love for Christ. I do not define my love for Erin by quoting what vows I have kept, but rather my delight for her. The same is true of our relationship with God in Christ. So may we enjoy our **belonging to Christ, so He will produce fruit in us, and that we can serve in a new way, not by a written code, but through the Spirit of God in the new Covenant**.