

THE ROAD OF THE RIGHTEOUS

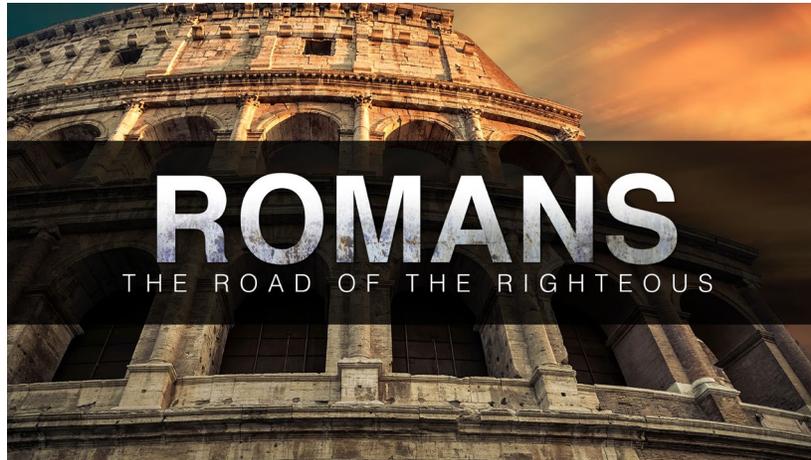
Expositional Study Of Romans

Romans 7:1-6

Written By

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Show me an effective Bible teacher and/or preacher, and I'll show you someone who lovingly and passionately defends biblical truth and the true gospel of Jesus Christ. Why? Because spiritual maturation and ultimate glorification is at stake. Paul was, as you can imagine, such a man.

Writing to the theologically drifting Galatian churches (Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe) around 49 A.D. from Antioch, Paul forcefully warned them with these pointed and powerful words:

⁶ I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; ⁷ which is *really* not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! ⁹ As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed! (Gal. 1).

Judaizers, or Christian Jewish members of the churches, during the apostolic and postapostolic periods, attempted to convince Gentile believers to adhere to Jewish religious rites, especially circumcision, in order to be *truly* saved by Jesus. Obviously, their heretical teaching disturbed and misled a number of Gentile . . . and Jewish Christians. No wonder, then, Paul said what he said. The gospel of Jesus is *always* about grace, and is in no way wedded to perpetual obedience to Law

(contextually, Mosaic Law), and not even an angelic messenger who says likewise can alter this timeless truth.

Why did so many of the Galatians fall for this demonic ploy launched by false teachers? First, they were probably duped because people, by and large, intrinsically have a hard time believing something costly and precious can be absolutely free without something being required from them. Second, they embraced the false theological position because man is, at his core, prideful and arrogant, thinking that his actions must count for something before God. In four short verses Paul laid this tenuous teaching to rest in a forceful manner.

But it wouldn't be the last time he would face this confusion between grace and the law. Writing to the Roman church eight years later in 57 A.D., he waxed eloquent about the free nature of Christ's gospel of grace where salvation is concerned, as opposed to a sinner securing salvation by means of grace plus obedience to the Law. Chapter 3, verses 20-23, is pivotal in his argument:

²⁰ because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin. ²¹ But now apart from the Law *the* righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²² even *the* righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God . . . (Rom. 3).

This is as forceful as his words to the Galatians, isn't it? And he didn't stop there either. In chapter 5, verse 1, he was equally candid about how a sinner is justified by faith in God's grace without adherence to the Law:

¹ Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 5).

Obedience to the Law isn't mentioned because it has nothing to do with salvation.

Knowing Jews in the Roman church would struggle with this concept, in chapter 6 Paul answered potential questions about the ramifications of justification by faith being based in God's grace coupled with no observance of the Law. Jewish Romans, who had a high esteem for the Law, felt that Paul's free grace position denigrated the Law and led to lawless living. After all, if grace saves a sinner, then converts should just go out and sin more so there is more grace to cover sin. Paul dismantled that erroneous conclusion in Romans 6, verses 1 through 14. In verses 15 through 23 he laid to rest the misguided theological notion that his teaching about grace and the law freed people to sin freely because they were not under the law anymore.

Unfortunately, some heretical theological concepts die hard because they are so ingrained in our psyche. The wedding of law and grace is a case in point. When we turn to Romans 7, we discover that Paul patiently and lovingly guided his "students," *one more time*, to a sound and proper understanding of the gospel of grace by addressing the issue from several new angles. What a teacher. What a shepherd.

If you have a background steeped in religious law and ritual, I'm sure you can, and will, appreciate Paul's method. He knew how hard it would be for you to leave your upbringing bathed in law and grace, and to accept and embrace grace for your justification in God's courtroom. Changing theological/spiritual/religious paradigms is no easy task, but it is so important where the gospel is concerned because so much hangs in the proverbial balance. In light of that truth, I pray Paul's words here would so penetrate your heart and mind that you would a spiritual "a ha"

moment, a flash of major insight so you can not only know the living God, but know how to live before Him.

With verses one through six, Paul definitively demonstrates how justification by faith in God's free grace does not lead to lawless living, but to lawful living and true spiritual growth. The following main motif drawn from these inspired verses drives this concept home:

A New Marriage Leads To New Life And Living (Rom. 6:1-6)

Did you get that? If you are remarried you get it. Even if you are not remarried, or even if you are single, you get it. A new marriage with a new mate gives you new opportunities beyond what you had in your prior relationship. What has this got to do with the problem between law and grace? Like I usually say, everything.

To fully understand Paul's point, we need to follow the development of his argument. It is constructed in a two-fold format.

The Reality: Death Frees A Person To Remarry (Rom. 7:1-3)

This is Paul's opening premise and one he expects everyone, whether they are Jews under Mosaic Law or Gentiles under Roman law, fully understands. This is why he says what he says:

¹ Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives?

Who is Paul addressing here? I think it is primarily Jews. Why do I say this? Here are a couple of reasons: One, Paul does employ the word "brethren" in Romans to denote Jews (Rom. 9:3; 10:1; 11:25). Two, the Mosaic Law has been Paul's primary focus in Romans chapters two through five, which he gives minimal notice to natural law, as in Romans 2, verse 14. Three, Paul addresses questions in chapter six which could possibly arise from a misunderstanding about the relation of the Mosaic Law to the concept of grace. Four, Paul quotes the Old Testament more in Romans than in any other book, which means he had the OT in mind as he wrote (Rom. 1:17/Hab. 2:4; 2:24/Isa. 52:5; 3:4/Psa. 51:4; 3:10-12/Psa. 14:2-3; 3:13a/Psa. 5:9; 3:13b/Psa. 140:3; 3:14/Psa. 10:7; 3:15-17/Isa. 59:7-8 . . . to name a few of the fifty-seven examples).¹ Five, Gentiles in the church could have easily been God-fearing Gentiles converted from the local Jewish synagogues, which ostensibly means they would have possessed a working knowledge of the Mosaic Law.

In any event, Paul opens by telling the Jewish brethren that they all should understand the premise that the Law has dominion over a person only while the person is alive. Once they die, the Law has no jurisdiction over them. They are, in a sense, free from the demands and dictates of the Law. Why does he make this point? He wants to ultimately demonstrate how believers are free from the Law because of the death of Christ.

Before, however, he gets to this point, he carefully builds his case so gospel truth could be appreciated and embraced. He, in classic Pauline fashion, drives home his premise with a common sense illustration involving a specific marriage case:

² For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. ³ So then,

¹Tim Hoelscher, "Paul's Use of Old Testament Quotations in Romans," accessed November 1, 2018, <http://www.graceteaching.com/notes/paulsuseofot.pdf>.

if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man.

His point is as clear as it is simple: If you are a woman and you married, you are under the lawful dominion of your husband. If he dies, however, your marriage is abolished completely, leaving you open to the potential of marrying someone else. Of course, as Paul says, if you married another man while your mate was still alive you would be guilty of adultery. This is assuming your divorce was not on biblical grounds (infidelity or an unbelieving mate he desired to end the marriage because of your faith, Matt. 19:9; 1 Cor. 7). In any event, the premise is easily understood: death frees a mate to remarry with no stigma.

What has this got to do with the concept of the Law and grace? Everything, as I've stated. Since this principle is true in the flesh and blood marital world, it is true in the spiritual world. More precisely, just as a woman is free to marry another man when her husband dies, so a saint is free to leave their old mate, the Law, for a new mate, Jesus. Paul develops this concept in the application of his legal point in verses 4 through 6. Here we encounter . . .

The Result: A New Mate Equals New Life (Rom. 7:4-6)

Paul's opening word, "therefore," introduces us to the conclusion(s) he draws from what he just articulated:

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

What is Paul getting at here? He's saying that our identification, by faith, with the death of Jesus, illustrates we are now free from our first mate, the Law. Pragmatically, this means we are free to marry the second husband, Jesus, by means of justification by faith in His rich, royal grace. Once we come to Jesus in faith, once we accept His grace, we, *ipso facto*, are no longer under the dictates and condemnation of the Law. Jesus has fulfilled all the requirements of the law by living a perfectly holy life (Rom. 10:4); therefore, our identification with His work frees us from said Law. As D. Martyn Lloyd Jones observes:

We are no longer in the position of trying to save ourselves, to justify ourselves, to sanctify ourselves and to make ourselves fit to stand in the presence of God by keeping the Law. That was our position; that is till the position common to the whole of mankind. God said to the Jews in particular, through Moses, 'Do this and thou shalt live,' which means, If you keep this law you shall be justified. He told the whole human race when He made known His Law at the beginning, that if men keep it He would be satisfied. That is what is meant by being 'under the law'; it means the Law as a means or method of saving ourselves, of being justified before God, of being sanctified in the presence of God. The glory of the Christian gospel is that we are no longer in that position; we are now 'under grace'. We are no longer trying to justify ourselves by works, or by conformity to the Law.²

²Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Law: Its Functions and Limits: An Exposition of Romans 7:1-8:4* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2010), 25-26.

Put differently, the Law, the believer's first 'husband' prior to salvation now has no dominion over him. Why? Because of his faith-identification with Christ's death terminates that 'marriage,' as it were, leaving him free to marry the one who died and rose again for his sin, Jesus, the Christ.

But the analogy appears to be inconsistent, doesn't it? In Paul's analogy the husband died and the wife went on to remarry. However, in the application of the analogy, the wife dies but then remarries. What is going on here? Wiersbe gives us the much needed insight when he states,

If you and I are represented by the wife, and the Law is represented by the husband, then the application does not follow the illustration. If the wife died in the illustration, the only way she could marry again would be to come back from the dead. But that is exactly what Paul wants to teach! When we trusted Christ, we died to the Law; but in Christ, we arose from the dead and now are 'married' (united) to Christ to live a new kind of life!³

Note well: The Law did not die. We died to the law, and because we are now wedded to Christ we have the ability to observe the Law and live the kind of holy life God desires from His people. This is the purpose of this new wedding relationship. It's not designed to free us from the law so we can live lawlessly. On the contrary, it is designed to equip and empower us to live so radically different than we did before that we produce spiritual fruit to God's glory. As Paul surmises,

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

When we stood married to the Law, we could never fulfill all of the Law. Hence we stood perpetually condemned. But because we are related to the One who fulfilled the Law (1 Pet. 2:24), we can now, for the first time in our lives, live radically different and holy lives.

What does a radically different and holy life look like?

- It makes time to be with God each day.
- It seeks for order life to match Christ's holy life
- It is convicted of sinful living to the point of confession.
- It puts God first and oneself second.
- It gives generously to support God's kingdom work.
- It gets alone for times of quiet and listening to God.
- It bears trials with a spirit of God, knowing that God is in control.
- It is careful about how others are spoken to.
- It goes where God leads.
- It witnesses to the lost per Christ's final command.
- It serves in the local body of believers.
- It makes being in worship a consistent reality.
- It is constantly committed to producing the fruits which God is looking for.

What fruits might those be? Paul details them in Galatians 5:

³Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1989), 535.

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law (Gal. 5).

Love is agape, or divine love. God's love is unconditional. God's love doesn't have strings and conditions attach. God's love isn't seasonal, nor does it hold a grudge. God's love loves the unlovely and those who do it wrong. Do you have this fruit? If you do, it logically leads to all the others. Joy naturally follows love because love informs you that the God of love is in absolute control of all things. That, in turn, leads to an inner peace the tragedies of the world and life cannot shake. Do you have this joy? How about peace? All of these fruits naturally appear in the life of a person who is wedded to Christ.

So much for the gospel of grace leading to a lawless life. On the contrary, it leads to a life of lawful living for the person in question is now empowered to really live for God in a radical fashion. Prior to salvation, we couldn't know this type of lawful, effective living. Paul reminds us of this truth starting in verse 5:

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

The meaning of "flesh" is clarified by Morris when he writes,

Paul looks back to the past and brings out a contrast with the new life. He speaks of being "in the flesh" (NIV, *controlled by the sinful nature*). "Flesh" is a Pauline word (it occurs 91 times in Paul out of 147 in the New Testament; the most in any non-Pauline writing is 13 in John), and the apostle uses it in a variety of ways. It may refer to the soft constituent of the human body (1 Cor. 15:50), and thus to a human being (1 Cor. 1:29). It may mean human nature (Rom. 9:5), or this earthly life (Phil. 1:24), or human attainment (Phil. 3:3), from which it is not a long step to outward appearance (1 Cor. 1:26). But this body of flesh is weak (Rom. 6:19), and the thought of physical weakness leads on to that of moral weakness. It has this meaning here and very often in Paul.⁴

This is an apt description of the life of the saint when he was a sinner. Sinful passions and desires, be what they may, were aroused by the Law. In what way? What the Law forbid is what he, as a sinner, desired to defiantly do. If the Law said not to covet anything his neighbor possessed, that is exactly what he did . . . and he enjoyed the sin for the moment. If the Law said to steer clear of sexual sin, that is exactly what he pursued. If the Law said to worship and honor God above all things, the sinner purposefully sought to worship anything and everything other than the living God. Any old guru or New Age teacher would do, so long as it led away from Christ. What kind of fruit did this produce? Death. Yes, no matter how we sought to adorn the trees of our lives with viable, vibrant fruit, it always wound up with the fruit of death hanging all over it. It's a point Paul has driven home repeatedly in this letter:

⁴ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 273–274.

Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve *death*, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them. (1:32)

Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to *death*, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? (6:16)

What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in *death*! (6:21)

For the wages of sin is *death*, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (6:23)

What kind of fruit is hanging on your tree? There are only two options: Fruit unto death, or fruit unto life.

Once we accept the grace of God as displayed in the death and resurrection of Jesus for sins, we become new people with a new power to live as we never lived before. Paul puts this new position, this new marriage in perspective with these words:

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

God promised the day would come when sinners would be able to live lives pleasing to God.

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. (Ezek. 36:26–27)

'The days are coming', declares the LORD, 'when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them', declares the LORD. 'This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time', declares the LORD. 'I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, "Know the LORD", because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest', declares the LORD. 'For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more'. (Jer. 31:31–34).

With Jesus' death and resurrection, these ancient prophecies are fulfilled in the Church before they will be fulfilled completely by Israel. Attempting to please God through the old code of the Mosaic Law has now been replaced by the "newness of the Spirit." No longer do we stand condemned under a Law we cannot possibly perpetually obey. No, now we, at the moment of conversion by God's grace, have the Spirit of God with us to help us live as God intended. And how is that? By living lives producing true holy, righteous fruit unto His glory, not ours.