

## Romans: The Newness of the Spirit

Romans 7:1-6

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May 20, 2001

If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to Romans, chapter 7. We'll begin in verse 1. We move today into a new chapter of Romans, but not yet into a new section. In Romans 7, the first six verses, from 1 to 6, Paul has one more point to make about our union with Christ before he moves on to another topic. And then in verse 7, he's take up a new thought. But in general, however, we can characterize the teaching of Romans 6 and 7 as follows. In Romans 6, all the way to chapter 7, verse 6, Paul shows us that God's grace leads to holiness. In Romans 7, beginning in verse 7 and going to the end of the chapter in verse 25, Paul shows us that God's grace does not mean that the believer will no longer struggle with internal sin. That is, in Romans, chapter 6, Paul is especially responding to the problem of those who think that his teaching on justification by grace through faith means that they can do as they please. He is refuting Antinomianism. He is refuting a view that says, "I'm a believer now, and the law has nothing do with me," or even more boldly, "I am a believer now, and it doesn't matter how I live." And he's doing it with the doctrine of union with Christ. He's giving his teaching about what it means to be united to Christ, and he's refuting this misunderstanding of his teaching by teaching about union with Christ.

Then in Romans, chapter 7, beginning in verse 7, to the end of the chapter, he's addressing the problem of those who think that our break with past sin is so decisive and so complete, that we no longer struggle with indwelling sin as Christians. There have been many, and we might say many fine Christians over the years who have adhered to teachings that we call *perfectionistic* teachings or *higher life* teachings which say that the Christian either is or ought to be free from any struggle with sin; that we are perfected in such a way that we have a complete victory over sin in this life. And again, Paul in Romans 7, is showing how the biblical doctrine of union with Christ is incompatible with a perfectionistic teaching or a higher life teaching that says that, at some point in the Christian life we never, ever have to struggle with sin in this life before the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, for Paul union with Christ not only explains why anti-law teaching is wrong, why Antinomian teaching is wrong, why licentious behavior by Christians is a contradiction of our identity and our profession of faith, but it

also explains why perfectionistic teaching is wrong. And with that as an introduction, let's look closely and hear attentively what God's Word has to say here in Romans, chapter 7:

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. 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. So then, 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. Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit for God. For while we were in flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. 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.

Amen, and thus ends this reading of God's holy, inspired and inerrant Word. May He write His eternal truth upon our hearts. Let's pray.

Our Lord, and our God, we ask that you would grant us understanding as we come to a passage which is difficult, but important. We know, O Lord, that You intend Your people to know Your Word, and so we ask that You would grant us not only understanding, but that also would embrace this truth and be transformed by it. This we ask in Jesus' Name, Amen.

If you are burdened by weariness, even a weariness to the point of despair in trying to work for God's acceptance of you, in trying to get God to forgive you, and trying earn His favor, in trying to condition His grace, then Paul has some remarkably good news for you in this great passage. And even if you don't realize that you are trying to earn the favor of God in some way or another, Paul has remarkably good news for you, and if you will pay attention what Paul says will change your life.

On the other hand, if you are not burdened by your sin, and a sense of your inadequacy, and if you think that you commend yourself to God, apart from Jesus Christ, then Paul has some ominous news for you in this passage. And even if you don't realize that you are doing this, Paul is going to say something which will challenge your whole way of life, and especially the way that you think; that it is proper to relate to the Almighty and Holy God. But we are going to have to keep our eye on the ball, if we appreciate what Paul is saying to us here.

Paul, especially, for instance, in verses 2 and 3 in his illustration, is giving us some complex ideas, which have confused many. And especially when you get

to his application in verses 4 through 6, he is very, very detailed, and difficult. And so we're going to have to keep our eye on the ball. I remember when was moving from slow pitch to fast pitch, that when those fast balls came, they were like bee-bees, and they scared me to death. And as they would get close to the plate, I would close my eyes and swing, literally blindly. And the coach would say, "Ligon, son, you're gonna have to watch the ball to the bat. And you're going to have to keep your eye on the ball." Well, we're going to have to keep our eye on the ball if we're not to get sidetracked by Paul's argument in this passage.

And to help you keep your eye on the ball, I want to do three things. First, I want to outline this short passage in chapter 7, verses 1 through 6, because the outline is clear as day. It is as simple as it can be. It's the substance of what is in the outline that gets difficult. But if you have the outline in your mind, it will help. Secondly, I want to ask you to look back to Romans, chapter 6, verse 1, and allow your mind to roam across that whole chapter and realize that what we are getting here in Romans 7, verses 1 through 6, is the third of three illustrations that Paul has given. He's been talking about union with Christ, and he's been telling you about what it means to be united to Christ, and he's giving you three illustrations of that. And then, I'd like you to go all the way back to Romans, chapter 5, and allow yourself to ask this question: What is the big picture being taught in Romans 5, Romans 6 and Romans 7, with regard to the implications to God's grace and His free justification by faith. What are the implications? Because in each of those big chapters, Paul focuses on one specific benefit or blessing or implication of God's grace. And by giving you that background, I hope to help you appreciate how radical what Paul is saying here is in Romans 7, 1 through 6.

First of all, let's do an outline in the passage. The outline is very simple. Verse 1 is Paul's statement of a principle. Verses 2 and 3 are Paul's illustration of that principle. And verses 4 through 6 are his application of that principle to us especially with regard to our relations to the law. So verse 1 is the principle, verses 2 and 3 are the illustration, verses 4 through 6 are the application. The outline, as I say, is very easy of what Paul is saying. But it's when you get to verses 2 through 6 that the difficult sections begin. But the outline is easy. Let's look at what Paul has been saying since Romans, chapter 6, verse 1. Remember that Paul started talking about union with Christ in Romans 6:1, and as he did so, he gave us two illustrations in Romans, chapter 6 of what it means to be united to Christ. In Romans 6, verses 1 through 14, he talks about baptism, saying that in baptism, we died to sin and were raised to newness of life in the Lord Jesus Christ. Well clearly, water baptism doesn't bring that about. But the baptism of the Holy Spirit in union with Christ does. So he uses water baptism as an illustration of the reality of union with Christ.

Then, in Romans, chapter 6, verse 15 to 23, he gives a second illustration. And that illustration surprisingly, in fact, we said shockingly last week, was slavery. He said, "Being united with Christ, is like having your master transferred. Suddenly,

you have a new master, and now you are a slave to righteousness, instead of slave of sin.

And then finally, he says here in Romans, chapter 7, union with Christ is like marriage. It's like being married to another husband. It's like having your old relationship with a previous husband severed by death, and being joined to Jesus Christ. And so each of these are illustrations of what it means to be united to Christ.

Then, let's allow our minds to even go back further, all the way back to Romans, chapter 5, and let's review three implications of justification of grace through faith that Paul shares in this section. In Romans, chapter 5, Paul says, "That one of the implications of justification by faith is peace. Because we're justified by grace, because we receive that free justification by faith, we are free from the fear of condemnation, and, therefore, we have peace with God." That's what He says in Romans, chapter 5. He says more than that, but that's one big thing that he says there.

Then in Romans, chapter 6, he says this. "We have holiness because of God's work of grace, because of justification by grace through faith." He says, "That one of the implications of our being justified freely by His blood, is that we are made to be what He intended us to be by the grace of God. We are free, not only from the condemnation of sin, but we're free from the domination of sin. We are no longer slaves to sin," he says. "But, we are slaves of righteousness." And then finally, in Romans, chapter 7, he says, "One of the implications of our justification is freedom." Now, we've been waiting for him to talk about that freedom for some time, because he's used a surprising metaphor in Romans, chapter 6, and for us, slavery doesn't seem to link with freedom. But it's here that Paul begins to speak about the kind of freedom that we have because of justification. And he means at least this: that we are free from the law, as a covenant of works. We are free from the law as the way in which we relate to and are accepted by God. And so, the believer is free from the law. Now in this passage, Paul is going to explain this glorious freedom. And I'd like to work through the passage with you in each of those three parts I've already outlined. Verse 1, the principle. Verses 2 and 3 the illustration. And verses 4 through 6 the application.

### **I. The Law cannot be the answer when it's part of your problem.**

In verse 1, Paul gives us a principle, and let me scale down Paul's principles in just a few words. He says, "Do you not know, brethren, for I am speaking to those who know the law, that the law has jurisdiction over a person for as long he lives." What's Paul's principle? Paul's principle is simply this. Paul is telling us that you are under the law as long as you live. You are under the law as long as you live. It has a permanent jurisdiction. And, therefore, because it has been

violated, it has a permanent relationship to you in condemnation as long as you live. So the law is not the solution to our problem. In fact, it becomes a part of our problem. Not because there is anything wrong with the law, but because we've already violated it. And if I could put it crudely, Paul is stating this because he wants you to understand that the law is not your 'go-to' guy. You know, in sports, often when the chips are down, and the time is ticking off the clock, there is somebody on the team into whose hands you want to get the ball. Well, the apostle is saying, "When the chips are down, and the seconds are ticking off the clock, and salvation is in the balance, the law is not your 'go-to' guy." That is not where you flee for hope. It is not where you flee for salvation. No, the principle is that you are under the law as long as you live.

Now, Paul's statement here in Romans, chapter 7, verse 1, actually takes you all the way back to Romans 6:14. I'm going to have to ask you to look at that verse, because what Paul is saying here won't make sense unless we look at that verse. Paul has said something very provocative in Romans 6:14. He had said that, "You are not under the law, but under grace." Now, perhaps you have been wondering ever since then what in the world are you talking about, Paul? What do you mean? What do you mean that I'm not under the law, I'm under grace." We've spent a lot of time saying what that doesn't mean. But so far, we haven't given much time telling you what it does mean. What Paul does in Romans 6:15 is he pauses, and he says, "Now, let me tell you what I don't mean by saying your not under law, you're under grace." And in the whole section there at the end of Romans 6, he's explaining that. And then when he gets to Romans 7, he picks back up the subject, and he says, "Now, let me tell you a little bit of what I mean when I say that you're not under the law, or that you're free from the law, or that you've been released from the law, and you're under grace." It's almost like there's been someone in the back of the class with a hand up the whole time ever since Romans 6:14, there's been a guy in the back of the class, "Ooh, ooh, ooh, Mr. Doctor Paul, I want to ask a question. What did you mean?" And finally now, Paul is coming back to that particular question.

And Paul states in answer to that question first, this principle: You are under the law as long as you live. In other words, he's reminding you again that the law, any law, is not the solution, it's part of your problem because of two things. You've already violated it, and it has a permanently binding nature. And so he's making it clear once again that the law cannot be a way of escape, it cannot be a way back into a restored relationship with the righteous, holy and heavenly Father. Now, he pulls back, and he says, "Let me illustrate that." And that's the second thing I'd like you to see in this passage.

## **II. You are just as morally bound by the law as a bride is legally tied to a husband.**

In verses 2 and 3, he says, let me give you an illustration, take marriage, for

instance. Paul here tells us that we are just as morally bound by the law when we are under the law. We are just as morally bound by the law as a bride is legally tied to her husband. He's saying, "Let me give you a picture of just how bound by the law you are. You're just as bound by that law, and you can't escape from that law any more than a bride can be being legally tied to her husband." Now, we've got to pause here immediately and say a couple of things. The first thing is this. Paul's illustration is complex. Look at verses 2 and 3. He starts off by talking about a woman who is joined to a man, and he speaks of the man dying, and the woman thus being freed from the marriage; but when he applies the illustration in verse 4, he speaks as if the woman has died. And it's all confused when you first think through it. Now Paul has to do this for several reasons. First of all, there are certain things that are not parallel between a human marriage and union with Christ, and he's got to bring that out, because Christ has actually died for us, and we've died in Him, as we've been united to him. So there are some differences between that and earthly marriages. Another thing is that usually women don't die and then get remarried. And, therefore, he has to alter this illustration in order for it to make sense.

The second thing you need to recognize is that Paul is not talking about every possible case that he can bring up with regard to marriage. You could easily get sidetracked, and say to Paul, "Well, Paul, you're talking about the permanence of marriage. Are you saying that marriage is always permanent, and there are never any circumstances under which a marriage can be dissolved?" Don't get sidetracked in that. Paul, himself, will talk about that elsewhere. That's not his point. His main point is simply for you to look at this. The general principle of the inviolability of the law of marriage, wherein it is a lifetime vow. Now I realize that that's crumbling in our own day and time. In fact, some churches have modified their marriage vows to be a little more hip, and a little more relevant. Some vows say now, not "as we both shall live," but rather "as long as we both shall love." In fact, just a couple of weeks ago in the ministers' staff meeting, Brister Ware was telling us that he was at a wedding where those words were, in fact, used in the vows. And when the minister said out loud, "Do you promise to love and honor and cherish as long as your love shall last?" Brister, audibly groaned, and everyone in the church turned towards him. Well, Paul is speaking of the general circumstance under which a marriage and the law of the binding nature of marriage is a permanent thing, it's a lifetime thing. He's saying, "Take this as an example. That woman can't go marry someone else as long as that relationship is intact and her husband is alive." He's pointing to a general principle, and he's basically emphasizing this. As long as you're this, as long as you live, you are tied to the law, you are under its jurisdiction until death do you part. Think of it. You are under a relationship that says, 'do this and live, do that and be cursed.' You've already done that, so you can't do this in order to undo the do that. The law continues to be binding as long as you live. It can't be a way of undoing the things that you've already done in violation to it. It can't be the way back. It can't be the way home. And Paul is illustrating that using the law of marriage, which everyone in the congregation would have understood, both Jew and Gentile.

### **III. Christ's death, and your death in Him, brought you into a new freedom and into a new relation to the law.**

Then, having given that illustration, he wants to bring home the point, and you'll see it in verses 4 through 6. Here he gives a three-part application: You died, you are united, and now you serve in the newness of the spirit. Let's expand on that. He's saying to this. Here's the application. If the law is permanent, as long you live, then you need to understand that those of you who believe, those of you have stopped trusting in yourself, you've stopped trusting in your own works, you've stopped trying to commend yourself to God, you've stopped trying to purchase and cajole God into forgiveness, you've stopped trying to make yourself acceptable to them, and instead you've looked to Christ, you've thrown yourself at His mercy, you have sought forgiveness from Him. Those of you who have believed, you have died to the law, your old husband is dead, and you are released from that law that bound you to him.

Secondly, you are united to Christ. You now have a new husband. Your new husband is the Lord Jesus Christ.

And thirdly, you serve under the covenant of grace. Look at what he says in verse 4. "You 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." And then look down to verse 6. "But now we have been released from the law, having died to that by which we were bound so that we serve in the newness of the spirit and not in the oldness of the letter." In other words, Paul is saying this. Christ's death, and your death in Him brought you into a new freedom whereby you were freed from the condemnation of the law, which would have been on you until death do you part. But because you died in your union with Christ, and because He died in your place, the power of that law, the jurisdiction of that law has been broken. And you are as free as a wife, whose husband has died, to be united to another. And, in fact, you are freer than that, because in the very act of being freed from the old husband, you have been at that very moment joined to a new husband. A new relationship exists, and now the relationship that you had to the law before is entirely changed.

Paul contrasts law and grace. And when he does so, he always has a double contrast in mind. Now keep your eye on the ball, because this is the hard part; but this is where it's really worth it. Paul always has a double contrast in mind. We are not under the law. What does that mean? Well, sometimes Paul points to this reality. In terms of the progress of redemptive history, we are no longer under the Mosaic code, a ceremonial religion, because Jesus Christ has offered up the final and perfect sacrifice. And so the burdensome aspects of the old Mosaic code are not longer incumbent upon us. We have been freed from that code. We've also been brought into a fuller assurance, because the final sacrifice

of Jesus Christ guarantees us the possibility of a conscience which is clean, and an assurance which is strong, because we don't have to repeat the sacrifices, the atoning offerings for sin year by year. It's been all done for us. We have but to receive it. So sometimes he's speaking of the progress from old covenant to new covenant.

But at other times, he is speaking in terms of the law as the covenant of works. The Law of Moses was not given as a different way of salvation. And yet in Paul's time, there were those who had virtually understood it to be such. And they were speaking of the inheritance of God by the law. They had misunderstood the function of the law. But there's more. Because, in fact, of the covenant of works with Adam, we are all obligated to perfect obedience, complete obedience, and all of us have failed under that arrangement. And yet we have an instinctive desire to try and right that relationship with God. But we attempt to right that relationship in the wrong way. We attempt to earn ourselves back into relationship, but the relationship has already been violated, and the law has already been violated. And so Paul is telling us here, "We are free from the law as a covenant of works, because the Spirit has united us to Christ, and brought us into a covenant of grace via that union with Christ." So what does it mean to be free from the law? It doesn't mean to be free from rule.

I was talking to a friend just last week, and he pointed this out. The New Testament is about a fourth of the size of the Old Testament. But did you know that there are twice as many commands in the New Testament as in the Old? So if you're looking for freedom from rule, you're not going to find any relief in the New Testament. So it's clear that freedom from the law doesn't mean freedom from rule. Nor, does it mean that there has been a change in standards. You know, maybe the bar has been lowered a couple of notches, moving from old covenant to new covenant. No, that's not the case either, because God's character is the source of law. Does God's character change? Not since I checked the last time. And so the standard of righteous has not changed. No.

When Paul says, "Not under law," he is pointing to a different ground of our acceptance by God. We are accepted through Christ. We are accepted by God's grace. We are justified freely by His blood, not through the law. The Jews of Paul's day, and many of their converts, had begun to think of the law as the central thing that characterized their identity, and the central thing which kept them in the blessing and covenant of God. And the apostle is saying, "No, the law is not the way back into fellowship with God. Only Christ is the way back into fellowship with God." And this leads to a totally different view of the law. If you have been approaching the law as the thing whereby you must please God so that He will accept you, you will not be able to say with the psalmist, "How I love your law, O Lord, I meditate on it day and night." It will be the most strident, brutal, unkind, unfeeling burden that you could ever possibly imagine.

But if you have been freed from an attempt to cause yourself to be accepted by



God and to condition God's grace by your action through the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ, suddenly your relationship with the law changes. Suddenly the law is sweet and is not burdensome, because it is an expression of love to a Heavenly Father who has redeemed us freely. That's why the preface of the Ten Commandments is so important. "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Now, therefore, you shall have no other gods before Me." It's not keep these Commandments, and I'll think about bringing you out of Egypt. It's I've already brought you out of Egypt. Now, keep My Commandments. Oh, that's being brought out from under the law and granted the blessings of the covenant of grace. It leads to a different view of the law. It gives us motivation to keep it. It keeps us the right goal for keeping it.

And, furthermore, there's a new dynamic. Paul emphasizes explicitly here in verse 6, the newness of the spirit. The law can't help you keep the law. But the Spirit can enable the keeping of the law. And the apostle wants to emphasize the work of the Spirit in the new covenant. Paul is contrasting law and gospel here. Two different ways of relating. And he is saying that we are free from the law as a covenant of works, that is, a way of being accepted by God; and we are now walking in the newness of the Spirit, having been freely accepted by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. And in that sense, we are free from the law.

Well, so what, you say? So what? Well, here's what. If you are attempting to earn God's favor, you're finding frustration in that today because of your own realism. There have always been people who have been able to be realistic enough about their own efforts to be frustrated. Think, for instance, of Ghandi, who read the Sermon on the Mount, and coming to it from the legalistic frame of his own background, he read the Sermon on the Mount, and he said, "If I were a Christian, I could never sleep. For I've never seen an ethical system which made the demands of the Sermon on the Mount." But you see, Ghandi thought that that had to be obeyed in order to commend yourself to God. He was thinking as a legalist. He was thinking under law. And surely if that's the way you were thinking, the law would be a great burden, and it would be a great bondage.

And the apostle is saying to you today, if you're thinking that way, if you're trying to commend yourself to God by your own effort, your own works, your goodness, then I've got a better way. You are freed from the law, as you turn from your works, and you trust in Christ. That's why David Dixon can say, "I've made a heap of all my deeds. My bad deeds and my good deeds, and I have fled from them to Jesus Christ." And so the apostle is saying, "You're freed from that kind of burden."

On the other hand, if today you think you can commend yourself to God by your goodness, by your works, well then the apostle Paul has some bad news, which I hope will lead to some good news for you. The bad news is if you want to commend yourself to God by the law, that's fine. All you have to do is do it perfectly. You show up on judgment day, you've kept the law perfectly, you've

done everything that God commands, you've done nothing that He has forbidden, and you're in. Anybody want to line up in that line? And the apostle Paul says, "If you take that tack, you will be condemned, because you are under the law as long as you live. But here's the good news. There are a lot of people who have gone down that road and they've have realized it. By the grace of God, they've realized it. And they turn back, and they've realized that "I can't commend myself to God that way." And when they do, that's called repentance, and when they turn to the Lord Jesus Christ, they find Him a cover for their sins. And they find the freedom from the burden of the law that the apostle Paul has been speaking about here. It's my prayer that you will find that freedom too, by His grace. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, we ask that by Your mercy You would grant newness of spirit to all those who will turn from themselves *and trust in You. We ask these things in Jesus' Name, Amen.*

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