

Sermon 55: Romans 7:1-4: Dead to the Law

OUTLINE

Dead to the Law

Married to Christ

INTRODUCTION

'If you can understand the difference between Law and Gospel you have the key to understand all Christian truth,' that is a paraphrase of something Luther said. Romans 7 provides us with a vital part of understanding the Law and its relationship with the Gospel. Paul has been assuring us of our wonderful salvation in this section of chapters 5-8. He has recently taken a detour to being dealing with the two big objections to the Gospel. Firstly he dealt with the objection that a Gospel of grace encourages sin. Paul's answer is Romans 6. Secondly he deals with the issue of the true nature and purpose of the law. Paul has been portraying the law in a negative light. He has shown so far that the law condemns both Jew and Gentile and condemns them all under sin (3:19-20). Whether it be the law written on the heart that comes to the Gentile through general revelation or it be the law written on stone that was given to the Jews, all are condemned by it. Paul has demonstrated that the gift of righteousness that justifies comes to us apart from law (3:21). That faith not law is the means of attaining righteousness as a gift and not by works (3:28). Demonstrating that Abraham was justified by faith not by law (chapter 4). And instead of making a comparison between Moses and Christ in Romans 5, Paul compared Adam and Christ showing that law was not a means of salvation but given to increase sin, 5:20, 'Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.' Anticipating the objection, that if the law does not save and only increases sin and we are saved by grace and not by lawkeeping, then we can just sin in order to magnify grace, and that the gospel encourages sin not holiness. Paul answers this objection with Romans 6 showing the new reality of our union with Christ and the inevitable fruit of holiness it produces in us on account of our dying to sin and being made into servants of righteousness. This has left certain question regarding the nature and purpose of the law hanging in mid-air. In particular the Jews would be very anxious about the negative light cast on the law by Paul and on account of that reject his whole presentation of the gospel. Paul puts forward Romans 7 in order to clarify our relationship to the law and its nature and purpose.

In introducing this part of Romans we are going to read through the whole chapter now together. In reading it I would like to point out certain parts. Firstly in v1-6 Paul discusses our new relationship to the law as Christians, that we are dead to law through Christ. This first section would be a response to those who believe that we save ourselves by law keeping, a vital portion for the Jews, or any who are of a legalistic mindset who attempt to find their righteousness before God by their own good deeds, read v1-6.

Next Paul wants to talk about the goodness of the law, he has put a negative spin on it, not because it is not a reflection of God's own moral character but because it cannot save. In verses 7-13 he shows how the law increases sin not because it is unholy and there is anything wrong with the law, but it increases sin because of our own sinfulness, this would have been a necessary correction to any who would be antinomian and have written off the law as something bad, read v7-13.

Now we come to the most famous part of the chapter where we look at the wretched man on Romans 7. There has been much ink spilled on whether Paul is describing himself as a Christian or an unbeliever, I believe that Paul is describing the life of the believer. However, I do believe that Paul is using a certain scenario to show that the law cannot produce sanctification in the believer's life only the Spirit can. You will notice as we read through these verses that Paul speaks in the present tense, indicating his experience as a believer, however there is no mention of the Spirit at all in v14-25. So as we read through these verses we need to note that in order to show the impotence of the law and the necessity of the Spirit for holiness Paul presents a picture of a Christian who is not depending upon the Spirit mediating the resurrection power of Christ but rather the law for sanctification, and it results in a case of despair, but not a hopeless case as we will see. Chapter 8 then presents the Spirit filled life and how by the Spirit and not by law we are enabled to keep the law. We will read from 7:14-8:4 to show how Paul compares the impotence of the law with the new ability that Christians have by the Spirit, please note 8:3-4 as a summary to this end.

Dead to the Law

Paul begins this chapter not having forgotten about the previous statements that he made concerning the law. He has shown that the law was given to increase sin (5:20), and that the Christian through Christ is now dead to the Law (6:14). He takes up this last idea of being dead to the law in Christ in beginning Romans 7. What does Paul mean that we are dead to the law?

Paul begins with a universal principle, '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?' Whether Paul is addressing Christian Jews who have the 10 Commandments in mind or Gentiles influenced by a Jewish way of thinking, or a broader category of law that embraces the law on the hearts and on stone is irrelevant the application will be the same. The law, any law binds a person while he is alive. If a person dies the law cannot demand payment, send to prison, or inflict punishment, death has put the person beyond the jurisdiction and power of the law.

Paul brings in an obvious analogy to illustrate his point. He uses the law of marriage as a way to show that we are no longer under law. 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.' (v2-3). A woman cannot marry another man while she is still, but

if her husband died she will not be committing adultery. Paul is not trying to answer every question regarding legitimate divorces and remarriage but rather to illustrate a point positively. We would be abusing this simple illustration by overtaxing it with questions Paul is not addressing.

Paul draws his conclusion in v4, 'Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law....' We must note a peculiarity about the analogy. Although in the analogy the husband dies, in reality it is not the law that dies but us to the law. In order for the analogy to be exact it should have been the wife that died, but Paul does not illustrate it in this fashion, and rightly so, for the law is still intact and active for all of those still under it, we died out of it. So now we need to consider this question, what does Paul mean by dead to the law?

Firstly, let us consider what he does mean. There is only one other way into heaven apart from Jesus Christ what is it? If we are perfect as God is perfect we will go to heaven. Remember what Jesus said to the rich young ruler when he asked about how he inherits eternal life, Jesus told him to keep all the commandments. This is where the bad news comes in, the very law which needs to be kept perfectly in order for anyone to be saved by it is the same law that tells us we have failed, whether it is the law of conscience or the 10 commandments. Paul puts it like this in Galatians 3:21-22, 'Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. 22 But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.' Because of our sin the law cannot be a stairway to heaven but instead becomes a taunting mirror that constantly reminds us that we are doomed because we cannot keep it. Being under the law is being in this position of trying to get into heaven outside of Christ. It is being in the situation where the only way into heaven is law and that law is very one that tells you, 'You are a sinner who is condemned and can never succeed by lawkeeping.' Being under the law is being under this sentence of condemnation, and Paul tells us that the law pronounces all as sinners (Rom 3:19-20). Paul tells us then in Romans 10:4 how Christ puts an end to the reign of law over us, 'For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.' The law is the only other way to attain to righteousness by which we can be saved, but by faith in Christ we are declared righteous by His imputed righteousness and hypothetical purpose of the law and condemnation of the law are put away for those who believe. The law says, 'Do this and you shall live,' and then turns around and tells us that we have failed. But then Christ was born under the Law (Galatians 4:4), and lived a law fulfilling life, satisfying all the demands of the law including its demand for a death to pay for our sins. And when we put our trust in Christ doing of the Law and not our own, seeing His life and death as the only hope for righteousness, God gives us that righteousness of Christ as a gift by faith not by works.

So then when Paul says we are not under Law he primarily means that we are not under obligation to keep the law for salvation, as well as not under the condemnation of the law. Christ has satisfied the life the law demands and the death the law demands so that all of its demands are not ignored but fulfilled. Some have read these statements about not being under the law and have thought that the Christian is no longer bound by the moral

requirements of the law. The answer to this is yes and no, and let me tell you there are many qualifications that make the situation confusing. Firstly, let me show you how Paul sees the Christians life as a law-fulfilling one, and then how he sees the Christian as not under the obligations of the law. Firstly, let us look at the immediate context to see how Paul engages with this issue, and as you do you will notice that in 8:4 Paul insists that the Christian is saved in Christ, and filled by the Spirit so that the righteous requirements of the law might be fulfilled. In other words, we are saved to the good works of law keeping. He puts more meat on this thought later on in Romans when he tells us in 13:8-10 that the life of love which the Spirit enables is a law fulfilling life. That the summary, 'love your neighbour' is a positive keeping of laws like do not commit adultery or murder. '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.' All you have to do is love God and love your neighbour and by default your life will be a law abiding one.

Now some today have said, 'Exactly, it's all about love, therefore homosexual marriage is fine, adultery when it is done for love is fine, etc.' However, love is law-shaped. We cannot define the parameters of love, God does. God is love and His holiness is expressed in His law, that is why He puts the law before us and says, 'be Holy as I am Holy,' for it is the law that outlines His character and our obligations as image bearers.

But then we back pedal and cause some confusion by saying that there are laws that Christians do not keep like the Saturday Sabbath law, or the sacrificial laws, or the tithing laws of the Land of Israel. And the church has made the distinction between the moral law of God which is eternal and is summarized as love God and your neighbour, between the civil laws of the land of Israel and the ceremonial laws of the priesthood and temple which have both fallen away with the arrival of Christ. So when God promises to write the law on our hearts in the New Covenant showing that there is some continuity of law, we stress that it is the moral law and not the ceremonial or civil law that is written there.

So we can conclude as Paul does that you are dead to the condemning, saving, civil and ceremonial aspects of the law, so that by the Spirit you could keep the moral law which has been written on your hearts. Let me try and illustrate what this means for us now. Do you remember when it was your birthday, or father's or mother's day and your 6 year old child brought you your card that they had hand made. Do you remember the spelling mistakes, the bad drawings, the mismatched colours, the rough scissor marks, etc. Yet because it was given from your child you delighted in their efforts and love. You did not scrutinize their cards as if they were submitting them as a doctoral dissertation with its rigorous demands. Well, now that you are dead to the law and are not trying to earn your way into heaven by your righteousness but have been adopted in God's family, our good deeds are now like those imperfect cards. They are faulty and would never qualify, but we are children and they are not to try and buy heaven, and God receives them. Freedom from the law includes

this freedom to serve God, not as though our life depended on it, but responses of love as children accepted in Christ.

Married to Christ

Paul not only indicates *that* we are dead to the law but *how*. '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.' It is through the body of Christ. This is a most important phrase because it indicates how we are brought out from under the condemnation of the law. Notice that Paul does not say that we die through the teaching or example of Christ. This would be to return to salvation by works. We are not saved by imitating Christ's life, nor by obeying the laws that He gave us to do. This would be legalism in another form. Notice as well that Paul did not say that died to the law by a mystical experience of Christ. I feel that this important to emphasize because we live in an era that is seeing a revival of Eastern religions who have an emphasis on experience. They believe in Pantheism, that everything is a part of God, and that we reach transcendence and an experience of oneness with God by things like Transcendental Meditation; Astral travelling; Yoga, etc. One of the great deceptions behind this notion of God and salvation is that the only thing keeping you from God is ignorance and experience, and that if you discipline yourself by these outwards actions you can ascend to God. This concept ignores that God is a person, that He is holy and that our sins have separated us from Him. The only way we can be reconciled to God is if our sin problem is dealt with. It is the body of Jesus Christ that deals with the sin problem. Jesus lived and died a sacrificial death as our substitute, offering Himself in our place for our sins. When He died our death, He was going through death on our behalf fulfilling the demands of the law for death. And in submitting Himself to the demands of the law He satisfied them and rose again bringing us with Him, just like the highpriest took the nation of Israel with him when he went into the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement. We are saved by Christ's death. Not by his teaching, example, or a mystical experience or vision of Him. It was His death that satisfied the requirements of the law against us and satisfied God's violated justice.

Paul continues with the picture of marriage and this is done in two ways. Firstly, he speaks about our belonging to another, and secondly by the fruit we bear, both are extrapolations of the analogy of marriage. Let us consider our union with Christ then through this picture of marriage for certainly this is what Paul had in mind as he tells us about in Ephesians 5:31-32, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." 32 This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.' Lloyd-Jones has some wonderful things to say on this and I am dependant on him for the following points.

Since Christ is our husband, the Bridegroom of the Church, we take His name. Just as a wife takes the name of her husband, leaving her own home and forming a new one with him, so the Christian leaves the dominion of sin in Adam and is joined to Christ finding their identity in Him.

Not only do we get His name we also get His righteousness, Paul tells us that Christ is now our righteousness, 'For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.' (2 Cor. 5:21). He is as Paul says in another place our righteousness, 'And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption.' (1 Cor. 1:30).

Not only that we get to share in His reward and sit with Him at the right hand of the Father, 'and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.' (Eph. 2:6). We are co-heirs with Christ. Paul tells us that this includes reigning with Him, even judging angels, (1 Cor. 6:2-3).

Not only that but Paul tells us that we share in our husbands estate, that all things are ours in Christ, 'So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future---all are yours, 23 and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.' (1 Cor 3:21-23). The meek shall inherit the earth.

We have the ongoing provision of Christ for His church, that as a husband is to love his wife as himself and provide for her, this is an example set down by Christ who loves the bride of Christ as Himself, 'Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. 28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, 30 because we are members of his body.' (Eph. 5:25-30). This would include not only our daily bread by all we need for life and godliness.

Because of Christ we have the service of angels, Hebrews 1:13-14, 'And to which of the angels has he ever said, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"? Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?'

We have access to God, and are accepted in the beloved being assured of a warm welcome in the Father's presence as a bride is accepted by her Father-in-law. We have Christ's name to come to His Father and our Father, and ask for those things according to His will with the assurance of being received and answered for Christ's sake.

We have the most doting of Husbands who loves, protects, provides and cares for His wife. A Husband who cannot do too much and has done all for us, and will continue to bring what He has started to completion. And one day that marriage supper of the Lamb will be the great eternal uniting as one forever, never to be separated again. Paul tells us that Christ has been raised from the dead and will never die again, neither will you.

But we must stress what Paul also stresses in these verses, that the purpose of our union with Christ is fruit. Just as one of the main purposes of marriage is children, so we are to bear fruit—holiness. We are not married to Christ to be a lazy, T.V. watching, self-indulgent, complaining housewife, but industrious for God, we are saved for good deeds.

Are you dead to the law or still in that bad marriage? Will you not leave that abusive relationship and come back to the husband you were intended for? Forsake the law and any

attempt to save yourself, accept Christ as Lord and Saviour, turn your back on your sins, know the fullness of His love and be fruitful.