

Some of the Jews from Rome that attended Pentecost on the day the Spirit was poured out stayed in Jerusalem and were taught the message of salvation in Christ. When they returned to Rome, they gathered together to worship Jesus. It was the first church in Rome. But these Jews must have felt at odds with their fellow Jews and so they incorporated much of Jewish traditions and rules into their new community. The beginning of the seventh chapter of Romans is an effort by Paul, and of course the Holy Spirit, to help them understand their relationship to the Laws of Moses. He has touched on it briefly in the previous chapters (5:20), but now he will explain it more thoroughly.

Paul is writing to Jews who are still trying to please God through obedience to the law. It can certainly apply to Christians today who have accepted a new set of laws.

During the end of the 19th century, there were a number of movements that challenged the traditional views of Christianity. The effort to purify the church was called the Holiness Movement. Liberalism had begun to creep into the church and it was becoming difficult to distinguish believers from non-believers. Sound familiar? The holiness preachers challenged Christians to be holy in all that they did (1Peter 1:15). It was a much needed plea. It resulted in a number of mission efforts and a purification of the church. But like many efforts to purify, in some cases it turned into legalism.

What did holiness look like? It began to be defined in specifics such as the clothes you wear, the absence of makeup for women, no dancing, card playing, or drinking. It even came down to telling people they shouldn't wear wedding rings because it was a form of vanity. So often, a godly effort is taken to extremes that God never intended.

Some denominations today have holdovers from that past, though they are rapidly abandoning them to conform to the culture. In some cases they needed to abandon them. In other cases, it is accepting what Scripture declares to be sin. I believe we all struggle to some extent with this issue. That's because the law is so much easier than a relationship. I can find loopholes in laws. A love relationship won't stand for them. We'll see that what Paul is getting at is so much greater than a list of things you can and can't do.

¹ Or do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives?² 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. Paul is speaking to the Jewish Christians who are trying to keep the law and be followers of Jesus. While the law provided for divorce initiated by the man (Deuteronomy 24:1), it did not give the wife the same freedom. The contract of

Commented [notes1]: Romans 5:20 (ESV)
²⁰ Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,

Commented [notes2]: 1 Peter 1:15 (ESV)
¹⁵ but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,

Commented [notes3]: Deuteronomy 24:1 (ESV)
¹ "When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house,

marriage ends upon the death of a spouse. If the husband died, then the wife was free to marry again.

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. According to Jewish Law, a woman who left her husband and lived with another man was considered an adulteress. This is all too common a practice today. In ancient Jewish society, regardless of the circumstances, the woman would be considered an adulteress. But if the husband died, she would be completely freed to enter into marriage with another man.

Paul is using the marriage relationship as an analogy for those Jewish believers to understand their relationship with the law. Jews considered themselves sons of the law. That is the meaning of Bar Mitzvah. When a Jewish boy was 13 years of age, he became married to the law. Later in the chapter Paul will explain what that did in his life (7:10-11). Right now he just wants us to see that we can't be married to the law and to Jesus at the same time.

⁴ 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. In the last chapter, Paul made it very clear that when we come to Christ we identify with Him in His death, burial, and resurrection. The law was nailed to the cross along with our sins upon His shoulders (Colossians 2:14). It's like matter and anti-matter meeting in a sci-fi movie, only it really happened. The law that condemns sin met the sin of the world upon Jesus and there justice was served. Both the law and sin were nailed to the cross in cosmic confrontation of good and evil. It's the selfless soldier falling on the grenade to save his team, only this soldier is God in the flesh and the grenade is the meeting of the Law and sin. Ka Boom! And God died. His body died. But His Spirit conquered death and hell (Revelation 1:18). The Star Wars writers were borrowing gospel ideas when they had Obi-wan say, "Cut me down and I will be more powerful than you can imagine!"

When you identify with Christ in His death, you become freed from the law. You die to the law. Now you can belong to another. You died with Christ. Now you can belong to the One that was raised from the dead. You can become one with Him. The Jews that were trying to be good Jews were torn between rule keeping and the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Let me give you a possible example or two of a conflict. The law forbade you to work on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:10). The Spirit might direct you, as He did with Jesus (Luke 13:14), to do something that shows the love of God on the Sabbath that would be considered work. They were caught between wanting to obey the letter of the law and the Spirit.

Commented [notes4]: Romans 7:10-11 (ESV)

¹⁰ The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me.

¹¹ For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.

Commented [notes5]: Colossians 2:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

Commented [notes6]: Revelation 1:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.

Commented [notes7]: Exodus 20:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates.

Commented [notes8]: Luke 13:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, said to the people, "There are six days in which work ought to be done. Come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day."

Or perhaps while witnessing to a Gentile he would honor you by offering you some meat that was not kosher. Let me give you a modern example. In many cultures, to refuse a drink is an insult. What if you are witnessing to a seeker and he offers you a drink (14:13)?

Let me make it clear that this is not about freedom to ignore God's moral standards. This is not an excuse to divorce your wife because the younger lady is more appealing. **This is about whether or not those who are following Christ are led by the Old Testament laws or by the Spirit of God through His Word.** We must be married to one or the other. For the Roman Jew, Paul is explaining why they are freed to let go of the law and focus on Christ. But remember, He will never contradict His word. To please our new husband is to keep the Spirit behind the law. It is a struggle in the Messianic Jewish communities today. I visited one that had split over this very issue.

Notice at the end of verse four, the reason for our union with Christ is that we might bear fruit unto God. This is a reference to the prophet Malachi. Malachi is exhorting the people to consider why God doesn't accept their sacrifices. He places the blame on the Jewish men's promiscuity. *¹⁵ Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth.* Malachi 2:15 (ESV) God blessed the union of a man and woman of faith because He sought godly offspring. Paul writes that we are married to Christ that we might bear fruit unto God. Fruit is sometimes referring to Christ likeness and sometimes to new believers. In this case it may be both. Those who are focused on the law, like the Pharisees, make their converts twice the child of hell as themselves, Jesus said (Matthew 23:15). But those focused on Jesus and belonging to Him reproduce new believers that walk in the Spirit and all His fruits (Galatians 5:22-23). The church of Rome back then and the church today will not reproduce spiritually healthy followers of Jesus unless we belong to Jesus.

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. Before we are born again and living in Christ, we are confronted by the law and have no power to deny the flesh. Then we are even guiltier because we know we are rebelling against the will of God. Paul will give a personal example of this in our passage next week. Barnhouse gives a great illustration of this in his commentary. He recalls the pleasure of committing a crime when he was young just for the thrill of it. Then he asks what would happen if a store window had a note saying, "Do not throw rocks into this plate glass window!" How long do you think it would be before someone defied the sign just to defy it?

That is how the law works on the mind of the unredeemed. You can't just tell a child not to touch a hot woodstove. You have to explain the agony it will cause, and even then, they will usually test it. In case you still don't get it, let me ask, "What do speed

Commented [notes9]: Romans 14:13 (ESV)

¹³ Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.

Commented [notes10]: Matthew 23:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.

Commented [notes11]: Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV)

²² 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.

limit signs say to you? Do you ever excuse ignoring the law?" I know I do. They have some restraint, but not what they are intended to have. When I see a patrolman, I forget about my excuse and slow down.

The law does not give us the power to obey God. It only tells us what He expects and shows us how weak we are. It reveals the depravity of our sin nature. By stirring the sin nature it produces death, which we saw in the last chapter is the wages of sin (6:23).

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. If we identified with Christ in His death, then we died to the law *and* to sin (6:6). The newness of the life of the resurrected Jesus is our new life in our new relationship. It's as if our husband died and now we married again. The difference is that our first husband was demanding and inflexible. His strict attitude brought out our rebellious nature. We tried to obey because we were supposed to, but privately did as we pleased and resented his demands.

Our new husband is so loving and gently leads us by His example. It is much more challenging than the previous relationship, because now we want to do what pleases Him out of love. Before we reacted out of duty and because we had to, but now we want to spend time with Him to know His heart and act according to His desires. And of course His desires are in accord with the Spirit of the law. In fact, we are losing our self in Him (Galatians 2:20). It is kind of frightening.

Barnhouse described it like "an inexperienced swimmer, the average Christian stands in terror of such deep water as complete abandonment to the grace of God. He fears to be borne along on the will of God in his daily life—to cast himself completely on the direction of the Holy Spirit. But, once he gets over the panic of such self-abandonment, he finds that the grace of God sustains, carries, cradles, and calms him—and he lives eternity in time. This is the purpose of Romans seven: to help the willing believer to cast himself into the depths of grace."¹

The illustration of Hosea is quite fitting to this passage as our story is often like that of Gomer, his wife from the world of prostitution. She bore him three children and then left to look for other lovers. Each one was successively poorer than the previous one. Hosea went and searched for her. He gave her lover the money to buy things for her (Hosea 2:5, 8). She gave her lover the credit for those things, not knowing it was Hosea who had provided it. Her lover probably thought Hosea was a fool. Indeed, love does things that appear foolish. Imagine the pain in Hosea's heart as he caught a glimpse of her embracing her lover in gratitude for the gifts. Can you see God's heart weeping over us as we run after other loves and receive His gifts but then credit them to the world (James 4:4)?

Commented [notes12]: Matthew 23:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.

Commented [notes13]: Romans 6:6 (ESV)

⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.

Commented [notes14]: Galatians 2:20 (ESV)

²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Commented [notes15]: Barnhouse Romans - Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans As a Point of Departure – Volume 6: God's Freedom.

Commented [notes16]: Hosea 2:5 (ESV)

⁵ For their mother has played the whore; she who conceived them has acted shamefully. For she said, 'I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.'

Commented [notes17]: Hosea 2:8 (ESV)

⁸ And she did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil, and who lavished on her silver and gold, which they used for Baal.

Commented [notes18]: James 4:4 (ESV)

⁴ You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Finally she was reduced to utter poverty and stood for sale on the slave block. Hosea bought her back. Now she must stay with him and do his bidding, but God had commanded Hosea to love her even as he was loved by God. And though she is bound by law to be faithful, Hosea declares, "Even so will I be to you. (Hosea 3:3)" As Francis Chan has said, that is crazy love! But it is the love of our Creator who has fulfilled the law for us that we might be free to follow Him wherever He leads (3:21-22; 10:4).

If the Holy Spirit had not prompted Paul with the message of Romans seven, we believers would be struggling to please God by keeping rules and abstaining from anything that might be enjoyable. Instead, we have been shown a wonderful new relationship from which springs our joyous service out of love. We can enjoy the goodness of God in the created world in a wholesome way, while having the power to turn away from destructive temptation (Psalm 16:11; Romans 6:14). We can join God in His work and experience the wonder of Christ in us, working through us, and touching lives in ways we never imagined. And the depth of our relationship only grows deeper and more wonderful as we draw nearer (2Corinthians 3:18; Psalm 84:7).

I can't leave this subject without commenting on the state of so many marriages today. So few women are submitted to be the helpmeet of their husband and give him the respect of his God given role. So few men love their wives as Christ loved the church giving their self up for her, and setting the spiritual example in the home. By ignoring God's design and giving in to our culture, our divorce rates mirror that of the world. And so we have a reflection of our spiritual relationship with our Savior. Just as a woman honors or dishonors her husband by what she says and does, so we honor or dishonor our Savior by our actions and words.

How many examples do we need before we see that God's way is for our good? We only increase our own suffering from sin when we ignore His design and refuse His instruction. Are we so hardhearted that we really think we have a better way than God's way? May God have mercy on us and turn our hearts to obedience that flows from a loving relationship, not because we must, but because He loved us first with an unending love (1John 4:19).

Questions

- 1 Who is Paul addressing?
- 2 Why is the Law easier than relationships?
- 3 How could a woman be free to marry again?
- 4 How can the law conflict with the Spirit?
- 5 What is God seeking in our union with Jesus?
- 6 How does the law arouse sin?
- 7 How does the law help us?
- 8 Go over the old and new relationship.
- 9 Review our parallel with Gomer.

Commented [notes19]: Hosea 3:3 (ESV)

³ And I said to her, "You must dwell as mine for many days. You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you."

Commented [notes20]: Romans 3:21-22 (ESV)

²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it E

²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction:

Commented [notes21]: Romans 10:4 (ESV)

⁴ For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Commented [notes22]: Psalm 16:11 (ESV)

¹¹ You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Commented [notes23]: Romans 6:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

Commented [notes24]: 2 Corinthians 3:18 (ESV)

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.

Commented [notes25]: Psalm 84:7 (ESV)

⁷ They go from strength to strength; each one appears before God in Zion.

Commented [notes26]: 1 John 4:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ We love because he first loved us.

10 What is the value of conforming to God's design for marriage?