

65. The Book of Romans 7:1-6

Paul's Epistle to the Romans
A message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier

(9-25-24)

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- I. Condemnation—verses 1:18-3:20
- II. Justification—verses 3:21-5:21
- III. Sanctification—Chapters 6-8
 - A. The Sin (as in the sin nature) - Chapter 6
 - B. The Law - Chapter 7
 - C. The Spirit - Chapter 8

Each of the chapters in this 3rd major section of Romans—is built around a key word:

- The key word in Chapter 6 is **Sin**—it appears 17 times.
- In Chapter 7 the key word is **Law**—it appears 19 times.
- And in Chapter 8, the key word is **Spirit**—used 23 times—more than any other chapter in the Bible.

“In those key words there is a Fort Knox of spiritual truth that will absolutely transform your walk with the Lord.”

We've already studied Chapter 6—which then brings us to Chapter 7.

- B. The Law - Chapter 7
 - 1. The Authority of the Law-verse 1-6
 - 2. The Ministry of the Law-verses 7-13
 - 3. The Inability of the Law-verses 14-25

We begin with our first point.

- 1. The Authority of the Law-verses 1-6

Romans 7:1 (NKJV)

¹ Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law)...

This tells us that Paul is addressing the Jews living there in Rome—those who are familiar with the Law of God. These of course would have been the legalists—those trying to please God and work their way into heaven by the deeds of the Law.

The word “**law**” is ‘*nomos*’ in the Greek and ‘*torah*’ in the Hebrew.

It is mentioned 523 times in the Bible—223 in the New Testament, 148 times by the Apostle Paul—so he is definitely interested in the Law and its effect on us. When we think of the Law we primarily think of the Pentateuch (also called the Torah)—the first five books of the Old Testament written by Moses.

After God led the children of Israel out of slavery in Egypt under Moses, He led them to the base of Mt. Sinai where He proposed a covenant with them—a covenant that came to be known as the Mosaic Covenant. It was a covenant based on them keeping His laws—which if they did, He promised to bless them abundantly but if they did not, He promised to punish them severely (Deuteronomy 27 & 28).

The Law that God gave to Israel through Moses when he was on top of Mt. Sinai contained 613 commandments.

- 248 were positive—things that God said His people must do like: “*loving Him with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength*”; and “*honoring their fathers and mothers*” etc.
- 365 were negative—things that God said His people were forbidden from doing like: “*worshipping false gods*”, “*stealing*”, “*lying*”, and committing “*adultery*” etc.

These laws were further divided into 3 categories: The civil (aka. judicial); the ceremonial; and the moral.

- The *civil* law governed their relationship with one another in society.
- The *ceremonial* law governed their relationship with God in worship.
- The *moral* law (think of the Ten Commandments) governed their personal lives—affecting both their relationship with God and their fellowman.

Now, to understand the authority or the absolute power the Law had on the Jewish mindset it would be helpful to look briefly at some Old Testament passages.

As you study the Old Testament, you cannot help being struck by the reverence and honor the Jews had toward the revealed law of God—also referred to by such names as His: *judgments, statutes, commandments, ordinances, and testimonies*.

Deuteronomy 6:1–9 (NKJV)

¹ “Now this *is* the commandment, *and these are* the statutes and judgments which the Lord your God has commanded to teach you, that you may observe *them* in the land which you are crossing over to possess, ² that you may fear the Lord your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, you and

your son and your grandson, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged. ³ Therefore hear, O Israel, and be careful to observe *it*, that it may be well with you, and that you may multiply greatly as the Lord God of your fathers has promised you—‘a land flowing with milk and honey.’ ⁴ “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord *is* one! ⁵ You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. ⁶ “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. ⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

To his father-in-law Jethro, Moses explained that his primary purpose as the divinely appointed leader of Israel was to “*make known the statutes of God and His laws*” (Exodus 18:16).

Isaiah proclaimed, “*The Lord was pleased for His righteousness’ sake to make the law great and glorious.*” (Isaiah 42:21)

Listen how David extolled the Law of God:

Psalm 19:7–11 (NKJV)

⁷ The law of the Lord *is* perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the Lord *is* sure, making wise the simple; ⁸ The statutes of the Lord *are* right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the Lord *is* pure, enlightening the eyes; ⁹ The fear of the Lord *is* clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the Lord *are* true *and* righteous altogether. ¹⁰ More to be desired *are they* than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. ¹¹ Moreover by them Your servant is warned, *And* in keeping them *there is* great reward.

The last command given by God in the Old Testament is—

Malachi 4:4 (NKJV)

⁴ “Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, Which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, *With the statutes and judgments.*

By the time of Christ, many Jews considered obedience to God’s Law to be not only the *demonstration* of salvation as God intended it to be—but also the *means* of salvation, which God never intended the Law to be.

One author said, “*Faithfulness to the Law came to supersede faith in the God who had given the Law.*” Or in other words, the Jewish people came to venerate and extol the Law more than the One who gave it.

Now Paul, as a Jewish scholar and rabbi—was eminently qualified to talk about the Law (legalism). Before his conversion, Paul (then known as Saul, a Pharisee) was the epitome of Jewish legalism.

In his letter to the Philippian church, he testifies to the trust he once had in his own human observance of the Law—

Philippians 3:4–6 (NLT)

⁴ though I could have confidence in my own effort if anyone could. Indeed, if others have reason for confidence in their own efforts, I have even more! ⁵ I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. ⁶ I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault...

So, with that as some background—in Romans Chapter 7 Paul takes on legalism which we defined last time as:

- *The belief that I can become holy and please God by obeying laws and commandments.*
- *The measuring of spirituality by a list of dos and don'ts.*
- *The focusing on the outward to the neglect of the inward (Jesus called the Pharisees 'white-washed tombs').*

In Romans Chapter 7 Paul lays out the epic struggle between right and wrong, between the flesh and the Spirit that all Christians experience on this earth.

Since all of us, who are believers in Jesus, want to live for Him after we get saved—we're often prone to try to do it through hard work and raw determination—which leads to *legalism*. Or in other words—trying to use the flesh to defeat the flesh.

Now, as Paul begins his teaching on **the authority of the Law** in the first 6 verses of Chapter 7. In these verses, Paul presents an **axiom**, followed by an **analogy**, culminating with an **application** on this very important subject:

a. **The Axiom—verse 1**

An axiom is a self-evident truth—something that doesn't need to be proved because it's obvious.

Romans 7:1 (NKJV)

¹ Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives?

It's obvious that the Law only has authority over people—while they're *alive!*

If a man robs a bank and while he's making his getaway, he gets into a car accident and dies—the authorities don't arrest him anyhow and haul his corpse into court to stand trial. At that point he is released from the authority of the law—it no longer has power over him.

Paul's primary point here (as indicated by the Greek) is that he is addressing his comments to anyone, Jew or Gentile, who understand the concept of being under the authority of the law. In other words, he is speaking in *general* terms of any law, whether Roman, Greek—or even God's Law given in Scripture—that the law only has jurisdiction over a person as long as they are alive.

b. **The Analogy—verses 2-3**

Romans 7:2-3 (NKJV)

² For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to *her* husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of *her* husband. ³ So then if, while *her* husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man.

Paul's point is obvious—according to the Law of God with regard to marriage a person cannot be married to two people at the same time—such a person would be an adulterer and a bigamist. (God did allow

polygamy in the Old Testament but Jesus said, from the beginning that wasn't what God intended for marriage—Genesis 2:24; Mark 10:1-12)

But if a person's spouse dies, they are free to marry another without violating the Law of God—

1 Corinthians 7:39 (NKJV)

³⁹ A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.

In fact, in most marriage ceremonies they include in the vows the phrase, *“until death do us part.”* According to Old Testament law, a husband could divorce his wife—but a wife could not divorce her husband. Paul uses the analogy to say, *“You Jews were married to the Law (under the Old Covenant)—and there was no way you could divorce yourself from it.”*

One author said,

“If only the law would die, we would be free from its hold on us. But the law is in excellent health (Matthew 5:18). This husband is not about to die.”

c. The Application—verses 4-6

Romans 7:4 (NKJV)

⁴ **Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God.**

This is a confusing application by Paul that seems inconsistent and even contradictory—but one commentator sheds light on what Paul is actually teaching—

“It appears that Paul has confused his illustration, but he has not. When we were unsaved (“in the flesh,” Romans 7:5), we were under the authority of God’s Law. We were condemned by that Law. When we trusted Christ and were united to Him, we died to the Law just as we died to the flesh (Rom. 6:1–10). The Law did not die; we died.

But in Paul’s illustration from marriage, it was the husband who died and the wife who married again. 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!”

Notice that Paul does *not* say that the law is dead—the Law still has a valid ministry in producing conviction of sin.

The Law did not die, we died to the Law, and it no longer has dominion over us.

But we are not “lawless”—we are united to Christ who perfectly kept the Law (Matthew 5:17), sharing His life, and thus walking *“in newness of life (resurrection life).”*

Romans 8:4 climaxes the argument: *“That the righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.”*

As Christians we are not under the law of Moses—we are under an even greater law, the law of love:

James 2:8 (NKJV)

⁸ If you really fulfill *the* royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well;

You see the Law can command me not to steal what belongs to you; but it can't command me to share with you what belongs to me—but love does both! In the old life of sin, we brought forth fruit "*unto death*," but in the new life of grace, we bring forth fruit "*unto God*."

To be "*dead to the Law*" does not mean that we lead lawless lives—it simply means you and I are no longer under the authority of the Law because you died in Christ (Galatians 2:20)—therefore, you are free from legalism.

As one pastor put it—

"Thus, there is no reason to be preoccupied with your failings, your lack of prayer, your lack of love, your lack of anything—there is no reason to try to live up to the rules, regulations, and expectations you've put upon yourself. When you realize that you died with Christ positionally on Calvary—you're free from the demands of the Law and can love the Lord and be loved by the Lord simply on the basis of His grace and not on the works of the Law."

The result of the Christian who finally throws off the yoke of legalism and simply starts to relate to the Lord through His grace is that—they inevitably begin to grow in grace and bear the Fruit of the Holy Spirit!

Romans 7:5 (NKJV)

⁵ For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death.

Far from producing the fruits of righteousness, the law had the opposite effect—it actually stirred up the evil passions of my flesh, which led to sin, and eventually would have led me to death.

"For when we were in the flesh..."

The word "**flesh**" is used two ways in the Bible:

In the physical sense

When the Greek word *sarx* (flesh) is used in the *physical* sense it carries with it no evil connotation.

John 1:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...

2 John 7 (NKJV)

⁷ For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ *as* coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.

In the moral sense

When the word flesh is used in an ethical or moral sense—it always carries with it an evil connotation:

Galatians 5:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

Romans 8:5–6 (NKJV)

⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those *who live* according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For to be carnally minded *is* death, but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace.

Here in Romans 7:5, Paul is using the term, “**the flesh**” to represent our “*sinful fallen nature*”—what we were in our unregenerate state.

In that regard to be “**in the flesh**” is the opposite of being “**in Christ.**”

Romans 7:5 (NKJV)

⁵ **For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death.**

Prior to our conversion we were ruled by sinful passions which were aroused by the Law. It is not that the Law *originated* them, but only that by naming and then forbidding them—it stirred up the strong desire to *do* them! These sinful passions found expression in our physical members, and when we yielded to temptation—we produced “*the works of the flesh*” that results in death.

Galatians 5:19–21 (NKJV)

¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, ²¹ envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God [i.e. ‘would experience the second death’].

Romans 7:6 (NKJV)

⁶ **But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not *in* the oldness of the letter.**

“**Newness of the Spirit**” speaks of the New Covenant—and “**oldness of the letter**” refers to the ‘*letter of the Law*’ (Old Covenant).

One commentator—

“*What is different about Christian service as opposed to our old life of sin? To begin with, the Holy Spirit of God energizes us as we seek to obey and serve the Lord. Under Law, no enablement was given. God’s commandments were written on stones and read to the people. But under grace, God’s Word is written in our hearts (2 Corinthians 3:1–3).*”

Jeremiah 31:31–33 (NKJV)

³¹ “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—³² not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband

to them, says the Lord. ³³ But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

Ezekiel 36:26–27 (NKJV)

²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.

One pastor put it well—

“The Spirit-filled life is a life full of love, excitement and adventure. It’s not a dreary existence full of duties and obligations (That’s what legalism is all about). We were meant to live in the newness of the Spirit (a whole new supernatural way of living), moment by moment obeying, yielding, and asking, “Lord, what next!?”

Therefore, throw off the yoke of legalism. Walk in the Spirit. Respond to His direction—and I guarantee you will find yourself on the adventure of a lifetime!”

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower—please reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

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