



I still remember the first day I met her. She was an intern at the church where I was applying for a job. I eventually got the job and we worked together for over six months before I was offered a position at a church plant. It was at this point that we both realized we were going to miss seeing each other every day. For me, I concluded that buying her coffee almost every week for the last several months had finally paid off. She was finally noticing me. We had dinner one night and decided that even though I was leaving the church we still wanted to spend time together. That time together progressed from friendship to a dating relationship.

A year later we took a walk on the beach late at night. We had been walking for a while, but all I could think about was the ring in my pocket and when I would get down on one knee to ask her “the question.” It finally seemed like the right time, so we stopped walking to look at the ocean in the moonlight. I grabbed her hand, got down on one knee, and told Charity how much I loved her. Then I pulled out the box. But this was no ordinary ring box, it was a lighted ring box. So when I opened the box, a light shone down to illuminate the ring.

That night I asked Charity if she would be my wife, and she simply fell on the ground and hugged me. After a long embrace, I needed to confirm with her that this meant yes, to which she replied, “Yes, Yes, YES!” I was ecstatic. The engagement was really just beginning for us; it was time to start the wedding planning and figuring out all the details involved in that. Seven months later we walked down the aisle and on January 7, 2005 Charity and I were married. That night we made a life long commitment to each other; it was a commitment to belong to the other, to not leave each other’s side, and to live together no matter what happened.

Have you noticed how marriage changes things for a person? You may or may not be married, but I’m sure you’re aware of this. Marriage changes the way a couple interacts with each other, and for couples seeking to honor Christ, an active change is their living situation. This involves a union of the two into one flesh. It changes the way a couple uses their time, because now they need to be intentional in spending time together to keep their relationship strong. Marriage changes the priorities of a person; a married person can no longer simply think about their needs only.

This morning we’re continuing our study in the book of Romans, and Paul is going to use the imagery of marriage to talk about

a believer’s relationship with Christ. This imagery will help us see how a person who has committed their life to Christ now belongs to Christ, just like in a marriage relationship.

Open your Bible to Romans 7. While you’re getting t here, let me make a few connections in this part of the book of Romans. The topic Paul addresses here is a continuation of what he wrote to the church in Rome back in chapter 5, verse 20, “*The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more,...*”. In Chapter 6 Paul has addressed this statement by talking about how we are dead to sin and alive to Christ. He talked about it in the sense of being dead to the law. He’s been talking about dying to the law since chapter 2 and now it’s really coming to a head. He also used the imagery of slavery back in chapter 6 to help explain this truth about dying to the law and living in grace. You almost wonder how many different ways Paul is going to give to describe the Christian life.

Life, Death, The Law and Marriage

In the first six verses of chapter 7 Paul gives a second answer to the question he presented in 6:15. The question was, “Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace?” He answered this with an emphatic, “No!” Look how chapter 7 begins.

Do you not know, brothers and sisters—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law has authority over someone only as long as that person lives? (v. 1).

Paul is writing to believers here. When he says, “brothers and sisters” he is expressing his deep love for the church in Rome. He’s going to do the same thing down in verse 4. He says you’re people who know the law, which was true of both Jews and Gentile believers. He wants them to know their relationship with the law now is quite different from what it was prior to coming to faith in Christ. He communicates that by reminding them that the law is only binding on a person while he’s alive. Death brings a release from all contractual obligations involving the dead person. Death breaks the power the law has on a person! Now Paul illustrates this very principle.

For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law that binds her to him. So then, if she has sexual relations with another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is

released from that law and is not an adulteress if she marries another man (verses 2-3).

So Paul chooses marriage to illustrate his point. Jewish law didn't allow a woman to divorce her husband, but a Jewish man could divorce his wife. But if her husband died, she was released from that binding agreement. That law no longer applied to her. And his death would make all the difference between another relationship she has, whether it's considered adulterous or a legitimate marriage. Death not only changes the obligations of the deceased but also the obligations of any survivors. Once a person is dead, the law has no power over them and their relationship with others also changes. In the case of the wife, the law binds her, but his death frees her. And the release from that obligation is complete. Paul uses a very strong word when he says she is released. It means to annul or destroy. The woman's status as his wife has been abolished, completely done away with, and she's free to marry another.

Dead in the Law, Alive in Christ

Paul uses this imagery of marriage and now he is going to go on to apply this.

So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God (v. 4).

Paul's application of this illustration isn't perfect, but it works. While it's the husband's death that frees the wife to remarry, in this case it's our death that frees us to remarry. So, in this case we are the one who died. He says, you, as a follower of Jesus, have died, which we already learned in chapter 6 where Paul said we died with Christ. That's why he says here we died to the law through the body of Christ. His death was our death. The old person we were is no longer living. That old person wasn't only a slave to sin, but he or she was bound (married) to the law, but now that we've died we've been released from it.

What does it mean, though, to be dead to the law? Paul talks about that right here in verse 4. The first thing that happens is when a person surrenders their life to Christ they die to the law. Christ's death was our death. The life we once lived is now dead. What does it mean to be released from the law? Well, first it means that the law's curse or condemnation of us has been broken. That's one of the things the law did: it condemned us. It constantly reminded us of how short we fall and how unacceptable we are to God. We could never attain to all the law required of us. But it also means we no longer rely on the law to keep us in line. The law could only tell us what to do: it couldn't give us the power to do it.

The purpose of dying to the law is so we can belong to another. This is when a union happens between the believer and Christ. It's a belonging to the other. The person no longer belongs to

the ways of sin that once ruled in their life because they are dead to that. The person is no longer united to the world and the ways of the world. They are free from the life of sin that once enslaved them and now this person belongs to Christ. It's a falling in love with Jesus and entering into a binding relationship with Him. This is a process that has happened for many of you. You were once living for the sinful passions of this world but you have died to those and now you belong to Christ. You once lived in grotesque sin, but when you made a commitment to Christ you changed.

The final difference here is evidence of a changed life. Once you've died to the power of the law and this new union happens between you and Christ, something inside you changes. People start looking at you and saying things like, "You're different. What happened to you?" or, "You've changed." It's because you've stopped giving in to the sinful passions that once ruled in your life. You stop lying. You stop cheating clients out of money. You stop looking at members of the opposite sex with lustful eyes. You stop doing drugs. There is evidence of a changed life. I like how Paul uses the imagery of bearing fruit because we all know fruit takes time to grow; it doesn't just happen immediately. Some changes happen instantaneously while other parts are an ongoing battle.

I've seen this process in my own life. I have a long history of not being able to keep the law. I was 15 years old the first time I was arrested. I was accused of doing a drive-by-shooting. I was pulled from the back of a car and had a shotgun firmly pressed against the back of my head while on my knees in the middle of the road. I didn't do a drive-by-shooting. I know all criminals say they didn't do it, but I was just a 15-year-old throwing fireworks out of the car. I was arrested a handful of times after that. When I was 20 years old it was in a jail cell where I surrendered my life to Christ. At that point the power of the law was broken over me and Christ set me free. Christ set me free in two ways; He set me free from the law of sin that I was married to and He also released me from that cell and made me a new person. I would go back to my hometown and people would say, "I heard you changed, is that true?" People would ask me to buy drugs and I would start telling them about Jesus. This was the evidence of the life change for me.

When you think about this, it's kind of like, who do you want to be married to? Do you want to be married to a man you can never please, who keeps a list of demands you must keep every minute, who gives you a performance review at the end of every day, who perhaps even is abusive? No excuses will be tolerated by him. Or do you want to be married to One who loves you unconditionally? The one who'll never leave you nor forsake you? The one who'll bring change in your life not through force but through love?

Notice how Paul finishes verse 4, “that we might bear fruit for God.” That’s the whole reason to which we belong (are married) to Christ—belonging to Christ changes us! There’s fruit that results from being married to Jesus. If you want to extend the analogy a bit further, there are children that are born from a fruitful marriage. What is that fruit? It’s a life that is lived for God. It’s a life that reflects the character of God. A life of godliness and holiness, not a life of sinfulness and bitterness. Accepting this makes a huge difference in how we live our lives.

The death of Christ’s mortal body on the cross has secured our release from the power the law has on our lives. Becoming a Christian and belonging to Christ involves a radical change of allegiance in a person’s life. Let me give you an example. When my family moved here, we were Padres fans. Before you boo me off stage, let me finish! We were simply Padres fans because we had lived in San Diego and they were the first professional baseball team I ever saw play a live game. When we moved here, it was an easy decision to quickly become a Giants fans. The Giants were doing great and won the World Series that year so not only was it an easy decision but it was also a smart decision!

Choosing to follow Christ isn’t as simple as that decision. When Paul talks about belonging to Christ he is insinuating that a believer is married to Christ. When you think about marriage there are tons of benefits, but marriage also involves a significant loss of freedom and independence. When I do premarital counseling with couples I talk about some of these changes. A single person has more freedom in life to choose to do what they want. Their time is their own, they are in control of their own finances. In premarital counseling I talk about how when you’re married you have to think about how to spend your time wisely and not neglect your spouse. You have to think about the other person in the relationship. This is the same when belonging to Christ. You’re not a single person anymore, you are in a personal relationship with Christ. Think about what a joy it is to belong to Christ, to belong to the Savior of the world.

For when we were in the realm of the flesh, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in us, so that we bore fruit for death. But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code (verses 5-6).

Paul gives a good comparison here of the differences between being committed to the law and belonging to Jesus. If you’re married to the law, you live your life in the realm of the flesh. Conversely, if you belong to Jesus you live our life in the realm of the Spirit. A person committed to keeping the law serves the demands of the law but a person who belongs to Christ now serves in a new way by following the Spirit. Being married to the law eventually produces death while being married to Christ

will produce life. Here’s the deal: you can either be married to the law or belong to Christ; but you cannot be neither and you cannot be both. If you are a Christian know that you are dead to the law and belong to Christ: I am dead to the law and belong to Christ.

It’s a new life of now belonging to Christ. This is what is called “serving in the new way of the Spirit.” *“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires”* (Gal. 5:24). The powers of sin and the law are broken when a person belongs to Christ. Unfortunately we don’t always live this way. Some Christians are what we might call legalists. Legalists think they can attain righteousness on their own accord. Some legalists live in a constant state of fear and condemnation, thinking God is disappointed with them for something they’ve done. They feel a strong pressure to keep rules; they are kind of like the Pharisees in the Old Testament. Legalists can also make those around them feel inadequate and unloved by God. Legalism can best be described as making righteousness humanly manageable. This is important: legalism doesn’t discriminate against race, age, economic standings or how long you’ve been following Christ. Legalism can tempt anybody and it’s attractive.

Let’s review Jewish history for a moment. God’s chosen people, the Jews, fell deep into legalism. God’s people were enslaved in Egypt for 430 years and then He delivered them from Egypt through His servant Moses. While they were in the desert, God gave His commands to Moses. The commands were created to separate God’s chosen people from the other people on earth. God’s people rejoiced at these commands and they helped lead them in holiness. But as time passed, God’s laws became a stumbling block and the people forgot about God. They obeyed His commands, but they forgot about the command giver!

After hundreds of years and generation after generation forgetting about the love of God, the Jews were conquered. They were taken into captivity in a different country, far away from the Promised Land they once occupied. The law that once helped distinguish them as God’s chosen people became a stumbling block. They forgot about the grace God showed to their ancestors. They forgot about the deliverance from Egypt. They forgot about God and shifted to simply obeying rules. The law that once set them free from oppression now became the oppression that enslaved.

If you have been a Christ follower for any period of time, you have probably seen the struggle of legalism or fought against legalism yourself. Now you know you are dead to the law. The death of Christ definitively broke the power of the law connected with sin that only produces death. The law can only show a person how they are flawed; it can’t save a person. The law will never save you. The law never could save you. The law

will do one thing: it will open your eyes to how badly you need a savior.

Christ did not come to do away with the law but to tell us we are now dead to the law because the law couldn't save us. Jesus said this Himself in the Sermon on the Mount. ***“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them”*** (Matt. 5:17). This does not mean that any of us are free from obeying the law. Especially for the believer, we obey the law He gave. Obedience does not lead to salvation, but salvation leads to obedience. Believers follow the law out of their obedience to Christ. Believers obey the law because they belong to Christ and want to do their best to please Him.

When I discovered this truth it was liberating. When I first gave my life to Christ there was an immediate change but over time I felt this pressure to keep all these new rules. I felt this pressure to do the right things, say the right things, wear the right things to church and hang out with the right people. It became almost too much to bear. There was this one day that I was driving and I felt this overwhelming freedom come over me. I felt God releasing me from these pressures to please others and to be freed up to simply enjoy His love.

We live in one of the wealthiest, most creative, most powerful, most innovative places in the world. What happens here changes

the world. If you have yet to find death to the law and this is a new marriage to Christ I encourage you to make a conscious choice to do so. You're dead to those sexual temptations. Anger has no control over your life anymore. When you sense jealousy sneaking in because of something your neighbor or co-worker just got, let it go. Because you are bound to Christ you can be a person who is full of joy, love and peace. Others will begin to notice the change in your life as you exhibit self-control in situations that once completely rattled you. You are released from the power and freed up to serve in the new way of the Spirit.

When I married my wife, it called me to a change of my lifestyle. Some changes were immediate and other parts took longer to accomplish. Last week Charity and I celebrated 11 years of marriage. We talked about all God has done in our lives over the last 11 years. It was great to recount what He has done in us, through us and with us. God wants to release you from living as if you're married to the law. He wants to free you from its crushing demands and unrealistic expectations. He wants you to know that when Jesus died, you died, and now you're married to another—to the One God raised from the dead. Not only does He love you and forgive you, He lives within you. Not only does He tell you how to live, He gives you the power to do it.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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