



In the Old Testament God gave the Law through Moses. The Law is the do's and don'ts of moral behavior. It consists of The 10 Commandments, rules for social life and rules for the worship of God. The Law is a difficult taskmaster because it requires that a person maintain a perfect standard of moral behavior. And then when we fail, the Law condemns us to death.

There was one type of person that Jesus liked the least: The person who believed they followed God's laws well enough to trigger God's favor and love. Those of you who know the Bible will know that the Pharisees were the most obvious example of this during Jesus' day. Jesus was regularly confronting them on their stubborn misbeliefs about obeying the law. Luke 11:39 gets to the core of Jesus' frustration with them, *"Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness."*

The problem with "law keeping" is the external nature of it. There's no effect on the heart. That's totally unacceptable to God because he's primarily interested in heart transformation.

As the church spread during the 1st century, the most hotly debated issue confronting the church was the question regarding the Law's relevance to a follower of Jesus. And some Christians today are still unclear about what to do with God's laws. Should we disregard them? Should we follow some but not others? Should we follow all of the laws?

As we come to the 7th chapter in Romans today, this is the subject. Paul is giving the second answer to the question asked in 6:15: Since God's not really into law keeping, since he rewards sinful rebellious people with salvation, does the gospel leave you free to live in any way you choose? The answer is not simple but I'll give it to you at the end of the sermon.

In order to help us understand this complicated issue, Paul provides the imagery of marriage as an illustration. Turn to Romans 7 to see what the Lord wants to teach us today about the gospel's implications on our actions and relationship to the law.

**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 starts by appealing to a generally accepted concept: following laws is better than breaking them. We accept the reward and punishment construct laws bring. Paul is speaking to people who "know the law." They knew the Jewish laws from the Old

Testament and the Roman laws of their day. Rewards for keeping laws and punishments for breaking laws is the world all the Romans lived in and it's the world we live in too.

Drug king El Chapo has bragged that he supplied "more heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine and marijuana than anybody else in the world." He will be punished for breaking the law. In contrast, people will praise you if you serve your neighbor. We understand this! But the gospel message of Jesus doesn't follow these rules. In fact, Jesus reverses it! He rewards lawbreakers by giving his love and salvation to anyone, as long as they see their need for a Savior and surrender their life to him. *"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Rom. 5:8).

This is a shocking and unexpected reversal that leads to confusion for people about the law. At the end of verse 1 Paul sets the stage for his marriage illustration that's coming by saying that laws only apply to people that are alive. This is a universally accepted idea: laws apply to the living; death cancels all obligations. He's going to apply this to how we died to the law in a moment, but before we get to that topic, Paul gives us the example to consider.

**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).**

This is a clear example of Paul's original idea: death cancels all obligations. When verse 2 says she is "released" it means that she is utterly and completely released from her previous marital vows if her husband dies. If he's alive, she's married. If he's dead, she's not married. According to the Jewish law in Deuteronomy 24, only the husband could divorce his wife. Because of this, a woman could be bound to a man in marriage, even if he was a horrible husband. So far, this is clear and simple. For the application of this to our spiritual lives, let's keep reading.

**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).**

This verse contains the main idea of Paul's logic in our six verses for today. Here's the truth he's teaching us: The Christian died to the law—just like the husband died—and is released from the burden to obey the law. But this freedom from the law comes with and is only possible through a relationship and new expectations. The Christian belongs to "another": Jesus. And they are expected to "bear fruit for God."

The implication here is that we were previously married to the law and the law had authority over us. It will say in other places in Romans that we were bound to the law, like a married woman was bound to her husband. There was no escape, except death. But now, through the power of Jesus' death and resurrection, the Christian has died to the law. We are free from its burdensome obligations. We are free from its impossible expectations. We are free from the fear of punishment when we blow it. The gospel of Jesus Christ brings us freedom from our horrible marriage partner!

Everyone loves a good love story. When I met Cassie, I was 28; living in Orlando; content being single but hopeful. The first time I saw Cassie, she was across a large room, talking with enthusiasm to a group of people. Then she moved on to another group of people with the same enthusiasm. I thought, "there's a person who loves people. I hope she comes over to me and rescues me from my boring conversation."

She did come over and we started dating two months later. Sunday afternoons were a special time for us during that time. We'd meet up at her house after church and go for a run or a walk on the brick streets of downtown Orlando. Then we'd casually spend the rest of the afternoon talking as we lounged on the couches in her living room. We built a friendship and fell more and more in love.

We love to hear how people met, how their attraction grew, and how they pledged their love to one another. We find some of our own stories in there and, if it's a good story, we're given hope that maybe true love is possible to us too.

But what if a person is married to the worst partner ever? That would be horrible! What if they are bound to them with the same life-long commitment but instead of giving intimacy and life, it gives suffering and death? This is how Paul is describing a person's relationship with the Law. In the bad marriage, a person is wed to the law. This person is basing their relationship with God on how well they obey the law. They're hoping to be saved and earn merit by their obedience. This describes a legalist.

The contrast is also offered. In the good marriage, a person is in a new relationship with Jesus Christ. This person is saved freely by grace and now expected to produce God's fruit. That's why verse 4 ends with the phrase "in order that we might bear fruit for God." The follower of Jesus is released from their marriage to

the Law and given a wonderful new relationship with Jesus so that we can bear fruit for God.

Some commentators think that Paul's marriage analogy should be continued. Just as a physical marriage produces children, our spiritual marriage to Jesus should produce spiritual children—new followers of Jesus. There's merit to this explanation but it shouldn't be limited to this. Bearing fruit for God should also include the fruit of the Spirit. The life of the Christian should produce more and more love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. More and more of these.

Often Christians feel like failures in these areas. They don't see any "spiritual children" from their life and they see less evidence of the fruit of the Spirit than they'd expect. How is this explained? In the next two verses Paul explains it by saying, don't try to produce fruit for God by the old pattern: following laws. Instead, there's a new, adventurous and unpredictable way!

**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).**

To understand these last two verses, look at this comparison chart. The fruit-bearing life for a follower of Jesus is described in the column on the right.

<b>Married to the Law</b>	<b>Married to Jesus</b>
In the realm of the flesh	In the realm of the Spirit
The Law aroused sinful passions	Released from the Law's power to arouse sinful passions
The Law works in a person	The Spirit works in a person
Bears fruit for death	Bears fruit for life
Serve the demands of the Law	Serve in the new way of the Spirit
Motivation is fear and self-righteousness	Motivation is love and selflessness

I think the most important phrase in these verses is "we serve in the new way of the Spirit." This is God's plan or method for a follower of Jesus to live. This is how a person produces God's fruit. This is the new way we live as we discard the burden of the law.

Think of the law like a hurdle to step over. The hurdle represents the law. In the times of the Old Testament, people strived to meet this standard. They were bound to it. Take the 6th Commandment: "You shall not murder." As long as a person never murdered someone, they met the standard. They could step over the hurdle. Pretty easy. But then Jesus said that hating someone else was a violation of this commandment as well. This deeper explanation meant that a bunch of former lawkeepers were now lawbreakers. They didn't step over the hurdle after all.

Take the 4th Commandment: "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy." As long as a person didn't work on the Sabbath, they met the standard. They could step over the hurdle. Pretty easy. But then Jesus said that leaving someone in peril because you didn't want to "work" was a violation of this commandment also. The deeper explanation meant that a bunch of former law-keepers were now lawbreakers. They didn't step over the hurdle after all.

Are you with me so far?

There were so many problems with people trying to meet the standard of the Old Testament law. Jesus revealed that there was more to the law than they imagined and verse 5 tells us that the fruit from that kind of life is the fruit of death. That sounds extreme but it's justified because a focus on keeping laws and then meeting them breeds self-righteousness; a focus on keeping laws and blowing it brings discouragement. The whole system is a mess. It was never intended to be used as a hurdle to step over. It was primarily meant as a guide to show us that we needed a Savior.

It's no wonder then that verse 6 says, "*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.*" This means that we are no longer bound to the law. We should not focus our attention on meeting the standard of the Old Testament law, like stepping over this hurdle. But does this mean that we rip the hurdle down and do whatever we want? Is that what "serving in the new way of the Spirit" means?

I don't think so. Instead, I think of it like this: The standard of the law remains, the hurdle is still there. In fact, I'd say the law is a low bar of expectation for Christian behavior. Of course we don't murder. Of course we keep the Sabbath. We are stepping over the hurdle every day as we follow Jesus and live in the new way of the Spirit.

But there's a whole lot more going on here that I'd like to explain. Whereas the law is clear, the new way of the Spirit is mysterious. Since the law is known we can make plans to follow it; the new way of the Spirit is a new adventure each day. Whereas the law can direct outward actions, the new way of the Spirit transforms the heart.

I'll use one of the same Old Testament commandments I used earlier to illustrate "serving in the new way of the Spirit": The 6th Commandment – do not murder. That shouldn't be a problem for a follower of Jesus. Jesus added "don't hate them in your heart." That shouldn't be an on-going problem either. Can we just be mature enough to move beyond that?

The true heart of this command is loving people. Who do you love? Jesus said your neighbor and your enemy. But which neighbor? Certainly all of them. But let's get really practical. It's not possible to show love to all of your neighbors in an equal

manner all the time. How do you determine which neighbors to love more this week and what do you do to show this to them? This is where the mystery and adventure comes in! This is awesome! Verse 6 describes this as "serving them in the new way of the Spirit." But how do you know the "way of the Spirit"?

Jeremiah 33:3 instructs us to ask, "*Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.*" Meaning, call out to God in prayer. Ask him something like, "which of my neighbors do you want me to show some extra love to this week?" And God will tell you. He'll tell you great and unsearchable things. He'll give you ideas you could never come up with.

Maybe this means you forgive your neighbor for trimming your bushes too far. Maybe this means inviting a lonely neighbor over for dinner. There is no limit to what God might call you to do. I guarantee it will involve love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness or self-control. But we can't predict which one will be expressed this week.

Can you imagine the adventure that awaits us every week? For the follower of Jesus, the hurdle of the Old Testament law looks low, meaning the standards of the law haven't been thrown away, but we are stepping over them all the time as we "serve in the new way of the Spirit."

Let me give you an example from my life this past week. These verses are intended to spark two reactions in our hearts: 1) They bring confidence that salvation is given freely from Jesus with no correlation at all to a person's conformity to the Law. This brings gladness to our hearts. 2) They instruct how to live as a follower of Jesus. We're told to serve in the new way of the Spirit. This inspires us. And this keeps us close to Jesus, asking him all the time, "how do you want me to live today in the new way of the Spirit?" This is mysterious and unpredictable and adventurous.

This relates to what I was saying at the very beginning of this sermon. These verses are answering a question that came from Romans 6:15: Does the gospel leave you free to live in any way you choose, since we're free from the law?

No way. The intended purpose of your freedom from the Law is to bear Godly fruit as you serve in the new way of the Spirit. This is something that the Law was impotent to do. But now the Christian is married to the all-powerful One who has all of the strength and all of the ability to produce fruit in us and through us, to God's glory.

As we are beginning 2016, each one of you has the opportunity before you to "live in the new way of the Spirit." Call to God; he'll show you great and unsearchable things.

*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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