

RELEASED FROM THE LAW AND BOUND TO JESUS

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Romans 7:1-25 (Luke 5:33-39)

Prayer: Collect for the Fourth Sunday in Lent.

A couple Sunday's ago, I made a general analogy that Israel, in relation to the Law of Moses prior to their Exile in Babylon, was lawless; they did what they desired, worshiped the gods of the surrounding nations, and oppressed one another. However, after the Exile, in a desire to avoid another Exile, many Jews, such as those among the Pharisees, became legalistic; thinking that by observing every aspect of the Mosaic Law, they could keep themselves from God's judgment. Both lawlessness and legalism have implications at a personal level in relation to any kind of law, or rules, that reveal God's righteous standards; because, Law cannot make a person good. Laws and rules can only reveal our violation of those standards and the penalty due to us for such violation (*cf.* today's Collect).

For example, the Billy Graham Rule, a practice that Christian men refuse to meet alone with any woman other than their wives, was a recent topic of conversation; because, this rule is something our Vice President observes. Even more recently, I came across an article where an insightful Christian man candidly wrote about his own experience in observing the Billy Graham Rule. While this rule is intended to protect men and women from adultery or even the question of such sinful relationships, he noticed that, as he increasingly strove to observe this rule (especially in an attempt to display his commitment to purity and devotion to his wife in the eyes of fellow Christians), he noticed that he actually began to isolate his sisters in Christ and, more importantly, began to notice he was feeding into his own lust. The very lust he sought to avoid was being fed by a rule; because, the rule turned every woman he avoided into a potential object of his lust. Do you see? The rule, while good in many respects, cannot change a heart, deliver one from temptation, or keep one from sin. Rules

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and laws simply highlight our own unrighteousness; therefore, seeking to observe good rules that highlight God's righteous standards only reveal that we want to break those rules.

Rather than looking to rules and laws to make us righteous and to free us from the sin that leads us to death, we need God's grace. As we must be delivered from the reign of sin and made alive to God, we also must be released from the Law and united to Jesus as our Bridegroom. Only in being **Released from the Law and Bound to Jesus** do we have God's abundant grace through the Holy Spirit to live in the "obedience of faith" which allows us to repent of our sins and trust in Christ's obedience FOR us *rather* than relying on *our attempts* to fulfill God's righteous standards by following rules. This is what Paul wants us to understand today, and he uses the analogy of marriage to illustrate this reality that he previously stated in ***Romans 6:14*** (READ).

1. **We Need to be Released from The Law (Verses 1-6 READ):**

- a. Verse 1: Jews who know the Law of Moses
 - i. Verses 2-3: Example Using Marriage: One is released from the Law through death.
- b. Gospel: **READ Verses 4-6**
- c. Why do we need this release from the Law?
 - i. **READ Verse 5** ("realm of the flesh" is the inherent sinful state of human beings in Adam where sin reigns in death. It is the Dominion of Condemnation from which we need to be delivered and to which the Law bears testimony of our deserved condemnation but from which it cannot save us. Verses 5-6 elaborate on verse 4. The law not only fails to deal with the reign of sin but it actually provokes / stimulates sin in the person who is bound to it; because, in Adam, we are slaves to sin. That's way we must be released from the Law just as we need to be freed

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from our enslavement to sin's reign through our death in and with Jesus' physical death; because, sin uses the Law to incite our sinful passions that are actually forbidden by the law (**READ vss. 7-11**).

- ii. These verses show how sin uses the law to bring death. To help us understand what Paul is saying here (esp. *vss. 8b-9*), let's go back to **Romans 5:13 (READ)**. Since Adam, while death was in the world, sin had not been revealed as violations against God's righteous standards until the giving of the Mosaic Law to the Israelites on Sinai. For example, right after the Law was given not to make any image of God, the Israelites turned right around and made the golden calf. Israel was commanded not to worship the gods of the surrounding nations or they would be Exiled from the Land, and this is precisely what they did; because, as a whole, collectively, Israel proved to be enslaved to sin; dead in Adam; and thus transgressors of God's righteous standards revealed in the Law. Paul, as a Jew who knows the Mosaic Law, identifies with his people and with the giving of the Law, but he sees what the Law does to those still enslaved to sin in Adam. The Law reveals the depth of our spiritual death that results in physical death.
- iii. This is just as true for the religious person today (maybe someone who thinks mere observance of the Billy Graham Rule can make or keep them righteous before God) as it was for a Jew in Paul's time (maybe a Pharisee who loved the Mosaic Law and desired to live by it, just as Paul did before he was converted). I personally think this is what Paul is illustrating in **Romans 7:14-23**. This is the apostle's pre-conversion legalistic fondness of the Law as a Pharisee. As he struggled to observe the commandments, he realized they could never deliver him from sinning, but stimulated certain forms of sin, such as

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covetousness – a sin (like lust) that is externally **in**visible yet experienced internally, revealing the true nature of the heart-desires to the one enslaved to sin.

1. Note the “We” in **verse 14 (READ)**. I think the “we” is a reference back to “those who know the law” in verse 1. I believe this is Paul's way of saying to his fellow Jews, his Pharisee friends, “I get your love for the Law. I've been there. But, if you're honest with yourselves, deep down, you know you can't observe the Law”. It is like me telling the server who said she wants to be good and me challenging her from my own experience that, deep down, she is not good. All laws and rules do, if they are good in revealing God's righteous standards, is show us how guilty we are. **Verse 14** also speaks of Paul, first person, as unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. This implies his prior unconverted status “in Adam” enslaved to sin as someone NOT serving in the new way of the Spirit but by the old way of the written code. This is the apostle's pre-conversion identity as a Pharisee who struggled with covetousness. **READ verses 15-16**. So, Paul agreed that the Law was good, as would any Pharisee, but **READ verse 17**. The Law, like the prohibition against covetousness, revealed “sin living in him” making him do what he doesn't want to do. He can't fulfill the Law's righteous requirements that he delights in; because, no good dwelt in him **READ verses 18-23**. Notice, Paul states he was a prisoner of the “law of sin” in him that waged a winning war against the law of Paul's mind. Many think such delight in the law in the inner being describes someone who is converted, but, as we have seen, even Gentiles, the

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unconverted, can agree with and delight in good things according to God's righteous standards, **READ Romans 2:14-15**. This, however, does not mean that the Law can deliver anyone from their 'enslavement to sin'. What is being articulated here is that, death in Adam, the 'flesh' (our sinful nature/passions in the NIV) are enslaved to "the law of sin". "Inner being" simply means "deep down and within". It does not mean a new spiritual person.

iv. What Paul describes of himself here in **Romans 7:14-23** characterizes someone's frustrated desire to observe the Law and follow religious rules legalistically but realizes it is impossible because of enslavement to sin that bears fruit for death. It is a description of the reason "why" we need to be released from the Law mentioned in **Romans 7:5 (READ)**. Only God can release us from the Law through the death of Jesus, which Paul, once a Pharisee "in Adam", yet now alive to God "in Christ", understands as he looks back with "shame" on his pre-converted life under religious law. **READ Romans 7:24-25a**. By God's grace we are, like Paul, delivered from our enslavement to "the law of sin" deep down in our hearts into the life-giving realm of the Holy Spirit.

1. This is what it means to be under grace; not under the Law. Do you see all the themes we have previously discussed re-presented here?

d. We must be released from the Law by deliverance from the realm of the flesh enslaved to sin and into the realm of the Spirit enslaved to righteousness. However...

2. **...Our Need to be Released from the Law does NOT Mean that the Law is Sinful (Verses 7, 12-14a READ)**

a. Knowledge of sin comes through the Law, but the Law cannot save us from sin. Observing the Law cannot deliver us from

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the reign of sin that leads to death; because, it simply arouses the law of sin in our flesh. We need the Holy Spirit to give us life through Jesus Christ that we may live to God, and this truth has implications for the life of a Christian. **READ *Romans 8:3-4***. The Law, because it is good, still has a purpose in our lives to live wisely and righteously by the abounding grace of God poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Just because we are not under law does not mean we go on sinning. By no means!

- b. The Law, summed up in loving God with all our being and our neighbors as ourselves, reveals God's holy, righteous, and good standards for our living, and the Holy Spirit Who lives in us and convicts of our sin, brings us to repentance, and leads us in the "obedience of faith." Importantly, however, is that we can never rely on laws or rules to either justify us or sanctify us (increase our holiness). No, we must rely on the Gospel of Jesus' death and resurrection FOR us that His Spirit may transform us by His abounding grace as we are continually convicted of sin revealed in God's law, repent of that sin, and grow in our heartfelt desire to serve our King Jesus as slaves to God set apart for the Gospel. AMEN.