



Sermon Notes | Married to Christ | Romans 7:1-6

INTRODUCTION

In the beginning God said that "... a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh," (Genesis 2:24). That is marriage! It is a bond, expressed in God's Word, without any limitations or expiries noted. Elsewhere, God's Word makes note of how long a marriage will last.

I Corinthians 7:39

"A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord."

Marriage is for 'as long as they both shall live'. This is still said in marriage ceremonies today. Marriage is God's creation. He designed the institution and the terms for it.

Yet Israel, as is revealed in the Old Testament, struggled with the permanence of marriage. From multiple wives, hardened hearts, seeking 'out' clauses, to straight out sin, Israel, time and time again, had trouble with 'faithfulness', and a struggle with the permanence of marriage. Over and over they struggled with their marriages, and as well, Israel struggled with their marriage to God.

Israel had been freed from their slavery in Egypt, so that they might become 'slaves to God', and thus were 'covenanted' to God. This is the Old Testament picture, God married to His people, by 'covenant'. Though God remained 'faithful' to His Bride and the 'Covenant', Israel did not. And so, God gave them a picture of what 'indissoluble marriage' really meant, through the prophet Hosea. God's Words in that book are 'strong words'. We recognize that. But we must be mindful that this is God's Word, and sometimes we need strong words.

And so we look to Hosea, and the indictment on Israel's 'marriage behaviour', for Israel is unfaithful to the Bridegroom.

Hosea 4:1-2, 13, 17-19

"Hear the word of the LORD, O children of Israel, for the LORD has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land; there is swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all

bounds, and blood shed follows bloodshed. ... They sacrifice on the tops of the mountains and burn offerings on the hills, under oak, poplar, and terebinth because their shade is good. Therefore your daughters play the whore, and brides commit adultery. ... Ephraim is joined to idols; leave him alone. When their drink is gone, they give themselves to whoring; their rulers dearly love shame. A wind has wrapped them in its wings and they shall be ashamed because of their sacrifices."

In light of this passage, and Israel's unfaithful behaviour, and that many spouses seek to be 'freed' out of their marriages today, what does God say about marriage? God had freed Israel, and had provided for them, yet they were continuously 'unfaithful to the Bridegroom'. So what does God say? By way of introduction, it is not what God says, but what He does not say that we take note of.

God does not say, 'I have fallen out of love with you, Israel. I see what is going on, and what you are doing. How can I love you like this?' No. God does not say this. He does not say, 'I am done with you, Israel. I am just done!' Nor does He walk out. He does not say, 'You have lusted after another and committed adultery, and I am done! Your behaviour gives Me grounds to end this, and I am done.' Yahweh 'does not' say this. God's way was not conditional, and was not dependent on Israel's behaviour or faithfulness or commitment. The Old Testament shows, and Hosea teaches clearly, that once wed, one is 'always' wed. And Yahweh speaks 'enduring love' for His Bride. He will 'allure' her back. He will speak tenderly to her, for this is a 'forever union', a 'for life' union, a permanent and binding, as long as they live, 'till death' relationship.

Hosea 2:14, 19

"Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. ... And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy."

This same picture is what Paul refers to and presents in Romans, that marriage is for life, that it is a permanent relationship, binding for as long as they live, binding by the law given by God, binding on spouses till death.

We pray that God will open eyes to His truth, that we may receive it, plant it deep, and live it out for God's glory, and our good.

Romans 7:1-6

"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? 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. 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. 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. 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. 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."

Paul sets forth two marriage unions for us to view. Both are separated/divided by death. We will examine and learn from both.

I. THE PRINCIPLE:¹

Romans 7:1

"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."

Paul is writing to Rome, the cosmopolitan Gentile city of Rome, and specifically to the Christians in the first century Church of Rome. He opens this chapter addressing 'the brothers', the Roman Christians, declaring that 'the brothers' should know the law, the law that states that marriage is binding till death. How so? Because the early New Testament Church did not have the New Testament as of yet, as we do today. They were working from the Old Testament, the Law of Moses and the Prophets. The 'early church' was a very 'Jewish' influenced religion. In the opening of this Roman letter, Paul refers to 'the mix' of the church group, the majority being Gentile, because Rome was a Gentile city, but also because as noted in Chapters 1 and 2, 'the Gospel' had been given to the Jew first and then the Gentile, but to 'all saints' who believe, both Jews and Gentiles.

Romans 1:13

"I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles."

Romans 1:16

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."

To be Christian in this first century movement was to know the Messiah, the Christ of the Old Testament. To be Christian was to know of His prophesied coming. To be Christian was 'to know' the Old Testament 'Jewish' writings, the only writings at that time. These 'Jewish writings' quickly became a manual for the Gentiles as well as for the Jews. Thus is the context behind Paul's saying, 'you know the Law'; 'all of you' 'of faith' know the Law. The Old Testament would have been the 'book' studied upon conversion.

Romans 4:3-5

"For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.' Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness."

¹ We will see this principle through to 8:1.

Paul refers to the Old Testament in his writings. He is the Apostle to the Gentiles. He cites regularly concerning the 'Law of Israel', which is the 'revealing' of God Himself. Paul is not referring to moral law or general law, or to the law of Christ. No. Knowing Christ in these early church days, meant you knew 'The Law', and therefore in the opening to this chapter, Paul is referring to this same Mosaic Law of Israel, which the Jews knew, 'The Law' referring to who God was, and which reflected God Himself, 'The Law' given at Sinai. This Law was not just for the Jews. The Law was fundamental to the early church in Rome also. To be Christian in the first century church, these Roman Jews and Gentiles knew the 'Law of Moses', this Old Testament Law, for their faith. Paul's words to them are as people who 'know the Law', know that the promised Messiah has come, know that His Coming has brought change, know that their relationship to 'The Law' has changed. And so, in verse one of chapter 7, Paul makes clear 'the principle': the binding of The Law lasts only as long as the person lives.

Romans 7:1

"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?"

Paul confirms, with language, that he is referring to the Mosaic Law, and that he is speaking to both the Gentile Romans and the Jews, and specifically to people of faith.

The word 'binding' means to be 'lord over' or to 'master over'. Remember, Christian, as slaves to Pharaoh, he was lord and master over you, just as 'sin' was once 'binding' over you. But both have gone to 'slave transfer' of lordship and you now have a 'new master': For Israel, it was from 'Pharaoh to Yahweh', but for the Christian believer, it was from 'sin to righteousness'. Up to the time of Christ, the Law was binding; one was 'married' to it. The Law carried 'lordship' and 'mastery', and only 'death' severed that relationship. It was binding, but only until death, like societal marriage is binding, but only till death.

The Theological Application:

1. Remember What Law:

Is it all law? No. It does not mean all law. The law that Paul talks about in Romans refers clearly to the 'Mosaic Law'. The Law given to Moses.

Romans 7:7

"What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet'."

2. Termination By Death:

If the people of God, Israel, and then the Gentile converts, are, according to Paul, no longer bound under the tenets of Law, as they were in Exodus, then we the people of God today must also have 'died' to something.

3. The Law and Grace:

If the Mosaic Law no longer applies to God's people, does that mean we are no longer bound by Law at all? Lots of people say, 'No, we are not; we are now under 'grace', not the Law.'

Romans 6:14

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

But we see where trouble rises with such thinking: 'antinomianism' practices, rejecting the Law of God, and replacing it with 'grace' alone. At face value then we are no longer under 'the Law', we are under 'grace'. We are left hanging for the moment. It seems plain. Death to the Law! However, Paul returns to this matter, but first he gives us a picture in verses 2 and 3.

II. THE PICTURE: (vv. 2-3)

Romans 7:2-3

"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. 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."

Two thousand years later, here we look to these verses pertaining to the Law on a dead person. We might not seem to need this information, but it helps us in terms of 'marriage'. Scripture establishes it as a 'plain truth'. The woman is bound while the man lives. The same point is stated elsewhere as well.

I Corinthians 7:39

"A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord."

Paul uses 'marriage' as a means to make his point. Marriage creates an important picture to make his point concerning the Law. The Mosaic Law is not binding on a dead person! This illustrates verse 1.

Romans 7:1

"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?"

Under Mosaic Law, the wife was unable/could not initiate divorce at all, under any condition. Under Roman law, either/both could initiate divorce. Though Jesus explains the 'divorce' concession.

Matthew 19:8

"He said to them, 'Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so'."

Moses authorized the allowance for divorce, (not God, not Jesus Christ), due to hardened hearts. Christ goes on to say that the 'original' design was 'marriage for life'.

Paul uses the word for woman that means 'under a husband' thus reflecting the headship of a marriage. If the husband dies, then the wife is released from the law of her husband, signalling God's design for marriage.

Deuteronomy 24:1-4

"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, and if she goes and becomes another man's wife, and the latter man hates her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife, then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the LORD. And you shall not bring sin upon the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance."

All this to say, there is a point to this picture. Death, and only death, 'released' her from the marriage. Only 'death' annuls or destroys; only 'death' obliterated the bond. Only 'death' releases! Verse 3 is clear.

Romans 7:3

"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."

The woman cannot return to live with the first husband for this would be adultery. If she lives with another, before the death of the first, she would be called an adulteress. This is being 'unfaithful', for legally you cannot add another husband. It is impossible on earth, and in heaven. Only if he dies can she remarry.

So too is it with the Law. Spiritually, the same is true. One cannot exist under two law codes. One cannot serve two masters. Paul says therefore to the Christian, 'You are no longer under the Law. You are 'dead' to it, just as you are 'dead to sin', dead to the Law. The Law is now 'dead' to the believers. The union has been severed.

III. THE POWER: (vv. 4-6)

Romans 7:4-6

"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. 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. But now we are released from the law, have 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."

The previous way no longer holds us captive. The relationship has been severed by 'death'. Why?

Believers have 'died' to the Law, through the Body of Christ, so that they are able to belong and be alive to another, and so that they might be able to 'bear fruit' to God. 'Dead' to the Law, and 'alive' to another.

Romans 7:4:

"... you also have died to the law through the body of Christ..."

This is the connection. 'Death' severed the marriage union, and likewise, 'death' severed the connective relationship to the Law. How so? Through the 'death' of Jesus Christ. So also we 'died' in Christ, through Christ's Body, and in Christ, we 'died' to the Law. Yes, as we've learned through this Romans' journey, it was a transfer of 'headship' as we learned in Chapter 5: Death to Adam, and Alive to God! Dead to Sin, and Alive to Righteousness!

Romans 6:1-4

"What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."

Alive to righteousness, and dead to sin, baptized in Christ.

Romans 6:5

"For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his."

This is truth declared. We, the believers, are united in 'death' with Christ, and united in 'resurrection' with Christ. Union with Christ, and united in death, and therefore we have 'died to sin', meaning that we've lost the power of sin. The power of death has lost its hold, and we will rise again.

Thus the Law articulates an economy of sin and death. The Law was given for a time and a people, clearly speaking to a people, that sin's penalty was such and such, the Law articulating the specifics of what that meant.

Galatians 3:24

"So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith."

The Law was an important guardian or tutor, like a schoolmaster, guiding and shaping the God-fearer, the one with faith in Yahweh, before Christ. The Law was the custodian of our relationship with God. The Jew looked to it for salvation, a means of 'do this and do that' and be saved. But it was never meant to be that, Paul explains. It was but a custodian, a tutor, a guide for a time; but never was it meant to save. 'Salvation is by faith' --- not by works of a law. This was God's plan for salvation. But the Law was a broker of a relationship with God for then. He brought them to Sinai, and made them to be a people, His people, among the people of the nations. 'You are My people. This is how they will know you, through and by the Law. Live by this Law!' And so the Law provided a 'standard of righteousness' for the people.

How do we relate to God? Through Christ. We no longer relate to God through the Law, but through our 'union with Christ', through the Body of Christ at Calvary. His 'death' in view, that He laid down His life, gave up His life for us; and so we too die and rise, and this is how we relate to God. It is the new way of life, the better way, through the 'union with Christ'. His 'death' in view, we are victorious. We no longer are relating to God via the Law, but through 'union with Christ', "so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead..." (Romans 7:4). This 'death' brought about a production change in the economy. We come to Christ. We live in Christ, In Christ is a new way to relate to God, not by Law, but by Jesus. 'Death' allows us to belong to 'another' besides Adam. And in Christ we can now "bear fruit for God". Belonging to Christ allows us to do so. It is a different way, a changed way from the old economy.

So, how does Law impart fruit bearing? What have we learned in Romans about this?

Romans 3:20

"For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin."

Romans 4:15

"For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression."

Romans 5:13

"... for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law."

By Law then, sin was defined. The Law showed sin, allowing it to be seen for what it was. Sin became known through the Law. And by Law, sin was stimulated and aroused.

Romans 7:5

"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."

By means of the Law, sin is highlighted, and humanity becomes 'fruit for death': sin awareness, sin production, sin death. -- Under Adam, humanity consisted of bodies of flesh, and 'bodies of death'.

This is not to suggest that the Law itself was/is evil. No. But the Law 'aroused evil' in us, and still does arouse sin if one is living 'in the flesh'. Everyone 'bears fruit', even from childhood; tell a child not to do something, and the child will want to do that very thing. We know this economy of sinful passion, but it is an economy that only bears 'fruit for death'. Law causes frustration in the Christian life. Physically, bodily, we still are 'living in the flesh' as we live life out, yet spiritually we live and serve in a new way.

Romans 7:6

"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."

As Christians we have been released from the 'old way' and now follow a 'new way', not by the old written code of the Law, but by the Holy Spirit. Having died in Christ, we are 'set free' to follow the 'new way'. No longer do we live to self; we have been set free to be 'yoked to another'. We are released from the sin of Adam, released from sin, death, Law, guardianship, condemnation, captivity, and 'fruit bearing for death'. In Christ, we are released to serve, not released to serve self again, but to serve the 'new way', the 'new way of the Spirit', the new way in Christ, in righteousness, in life by the Spirit. It is a 'transfer' from 'the oldness of the letter' (KJ) of the Law, to the new righteous way in Christ, 'new way of the Spirit'. It is not the end of the Law period, but it sets 'the believer' free of the Law to be in Christ.

Romans 10:4

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

The end of the Law is Christ. This means that we are set free of the Law 'to be in Christ', and therefore are 'dead' to the 'Law of Moses', free of that time, free of that place, and have a 'new focus', a different law economy. We are now dead to the Law of Moses, but are alive to law's fulfillment in Christ. No longer is it Law to God, but Law through God.

In Christ there is a new relationship through the Spirit, by the new way of the Law of Jesus. This means two things. All the futility and frustration of trying to keep the demands of the Law of Moses, and all the condemnation and guilt by association with that Law, are all atoned for in Christ, are submitted and yoked in Christ. This yoking in Christ then allows you to 'live the Law' in Jesus. Through Christ, and in Christ, you are now able to fulfill the Law practically as you live life. You could not do so before, but now

you can. That is the glory of this new relationship to Law in Christ. You are dead to the old Law and its demands and futility. There is no more condemnation. We are now free and live with a new way before us.

Galatians 6:2

"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

The Law of Christ is our life. He is now our 'identity'. We are a law unto ourselves now, in Christ!

We no longer have an 'external' written code on tablets, but have an 'internal' code, a code 'in us', written on our hearts. The Law is not just an external 'measuring standard', but the Law of Jesus has become our joy.

Psalms 19:7-11

*"The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul;
the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;
the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;
the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;
the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.
Moreover, by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward."*

Psalms 119:1-5, 14-16, 33-40, 48, 97-106, 174-175

*"Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD!
Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart,
who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways!
You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently.
Oh that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes!
...
In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches.
I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways.
I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.
Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes; and I will keep it to the end.
Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart.
Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it.
Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain!
Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things; and give me life in your ways.
Confirm to your servant your promise, that you may be feared.
Turn away the reproach that I dread, for your rules are good.
Behold, I long for your precepts; in your righteousness give me life!
..."*

I will lift up my hands toward your commandments, which I love, and I will meditate on your statutes.

...

Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day.

Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me,

I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation.

I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts.

I hold back my feet from every evil way, in order to keep your word,

I do not turn aside from your rules, for you have taught me.

How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!

Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

I have sworn an oath and confirmed it, to keep you righteous rules.

...

I long for your salvation, O LORD, and your law is my delight.

Let my soul live and praise you, and let your rules help me."

The Law is our joy! God's expression of Law and our edification go hand in hand. We grow wiser through the Word. We want to know about it, and we want to obey it, because this is new law and because we have new hearts to receive it.

II Timothy 3:16-17

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

As believers we are 'the new way', and the 'new way' is bursting forth in us. There is power found in 'union with Christ'. No other power surpasses this power. The 'old marriage' ended in death, and there is a 'new marriage' in Christ. If you are married to Christ, it can never be severed. The old marriage has ended, and you are, as a believer, wed to the ONE who conquered the grave. Death will not 'due us part' in Christ. God, the Bridegroom, is everlasting. We are now slaves to God, in a new way, by the Spirit. It was so for Israel, and it is so for us as the Church. We are married to Christ, as we will still be, when He comes. We await the consummation of our marriage with Him, when He comes.