

Dead to the Law; United to Christ

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[0 : 00] We're reading from Romans 7, the first verse from Romans 7. Last week, Bo recapped for us in lightning speed, Romans 1 to 6, and he recapped for us that we're all sinners and can come to God by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and that's the only way.

And Paul is writing to a church that's split with both Jewish and Gentile believers and to unite them in Christ. So starting at verse 1 of chapter 7, Paul says, Or do you not know, brothers, for I'm 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's released from the law of marriage.

Accordingly, she'll be called an adulteress if she lives with another man whilst her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is freed from that law, and if she marries another man, she's 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's been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.

[1 : 41] 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're 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.

Well, good morning, everyone. My name's David. I'm one of the pastors here.

Will you please pray with me as we come to God's word? Let's pray. Lord, we always need your help to even want to listen to you.

We need your help to understand what you're saying in your word. We need your help to believe it. We need your help to know how you want us to change in light of it.

So I just beg for your help for all of us this morning. In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, my relationship with my dentist is based on my teeth.

[3 : 10] What brings us together isn't mutual support in life. It's not our common interest in soccer. It's my teeth. That's what brings us together.

It's the main thing we talk about. We love talking about my teeth. He cleans and repairs my teeth, and I somewhat willingly pay him for it. I don't get offended like I would if you pointed out that my teeth are stained or that he advises more flossing and mouthwash.

I don't get offended because our relationship is based on teeth. It's what we're here to talk about.

It's a teeth-mediated relationship. Teeth are the thing through which me and my dentist have a relationship.

It's what our relationship is based on. Now, you might be thinking, I've gone bonkers, and you're either a little nervous or excited to see how crazy this sermon is going to be.

But like your relationship with your dentist is based on teeth, what is your relationship to God based on? What do you relate through?

[4 : 20] What brings you together? Now, we know from Romans so far that being converted and going to heaven is by grace and not by doing the works of the law.

But it's so ingrained in us as human beings to think and assume that our relationship with God, our ongoing relationship, is based on the law.

It's the main thing God is looking at and looking for in us. Are you performing? We think that God wants to relate to us through his law.

And if we think like that, I'm going to put it to you that you can't really enjoy friendship with God so much. Because God is more like a boss who's always looking at your performance.

And he can fire you. You can't enjoy that relationship. Thinking we relate to God through law, we will think that the way I change my behaviour, my thinking, is by laying down God's law more heavily.

[5 : 38] Just saying, God wants me to be over here when I know full well I'm way back here. We think God is just saying, be here, be here, be here. When we fall short and we fall back into the same sin this week as I did last week, we sense only his disappointment.

We doubt he could love us. Sometimes a law-based relationship with God will feel like we're angry at God because he's not giving me the happy life my recent performance deserves.

And we can actually be a bit annoyed at God. As we come to Romans chapter 7, we're going to find that our relationship with God is not based on his law.

He doesn't want us to think of him through his law. So to understand where we're going to go, we need to understand Romans, another quick recap, another super speedy recap.

In the first four chapters, Paul has clearly demonstrated that there's a great problem that faces the whole human race and that is God's wrath. Because all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

[7 : 07] Whether non-religious people who have a conscience or religious people, even the Jewish people who had God's law and try and keep it, all are under the same problem.

Why? Because no one lives up to what we know is right. None of us do. I can't remember the doll's name. Like, whatever that doll was.

Catacorn. There is one way to be justified. Justified, declared innocent. Be at peace with God.

To be reconciled. There's one way, we're told. It's not by performance, but the law. It's only by faith in Jesus, what he's done. Sharing in his resurrection life.

And what Paul does in chapter 5 is he zooms out and looks at all history. If you want to look at the human race, really it's two families with two fathers at the head of the families.

[8 : 10] Adam, the first human being. And Jesus. All people since Adam, all people have inherited his sinful nature.

Sin has been in charge. It's been ruling, reigning since Adam. And sin produces death. It cuts us from fellowship with God.

It produces physical death. Death has been reigning since Adam. All who belong to Adam, which is all people, naturally, are under the rule of sin.

I think we think of sin like we're basically good people and we kind of slip up here and there. We commit sins. We fall in and out of sins.

Whereas the Bible paints a bleaker picture than that. Sin is ruling us. We're under it. We have to obey it.

[9 : 14] I'm not talking as a Christian here. I'm talking in Adam. But the gospel is a new head of the family has come. There's a new family.

And there's a new rule. Sin isn't ruling. Grace is ruling. God's undeserved favour. Chapter 5, verse 21.

So that as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign. Grace is ruling. So there's two types of people.

Not religious people who are good and irreligious people who are bad. That's not the two types of people. The two types of people are religious and irreligious people who belong to Adam, Adam's family, or if you're in the new family, in Jesus' family, where grace is ruling.

Now, if it's all by grace, you're completely forgiven.

[10 : 21] Completely forgiven. Every sin is forgiven. God will only show you undeserved favour. Only. Why doesn't that produce a person that just does whatever you want?

Just a lawless person. Great. I've got a licence to sin. Why doesn't grace motivate you just to sin as much as you want?

Why doesn't it produce that? Well, that's chapter 6. We've died with Jesus. We've died to sin. What we want now has fundamentally changed.

Sin, when it was ruling us, was like a master. We've died to that master now. It's like a boss that calls us up. We don't work for them anymore.

They call us up at 9.15 going, where are you? I've got things for you to do today. We can say to sin, no, I don't work for you. We've got a new master now.

[11 : 28] We've got this fundamental change. We don't love sin like we did. It's not got power over us in the same way. So that's the first part of Paul's answer.

Now, where does God's law fit in? That's what we're coming to in Romans 7. Surely God's law empowers you to do what is right.

Surely God's good law empowers you to live a life that pleases God. And Paul gives a shocking answer.

It's an answer I'm not sure I've ever been so nervous preaching. It's such a surprising answer. As we come to chapter 7, really it's just explaining what Paul has said in chapter 5, verse 20, if you want to have a look there.

Now, the law came in. Why? To be a solution to sin?

[12 : 41] No. To increase sin. Whoa. That is surprising, is it not? The law increases sin.

And we're going to need the rest of chapter 7 to understand that. Paul has made a remarkable claim in chapter 6, verse 14.

Sin will no longer rule over you. Why? Because you're not under law anymore. You're under grace. We're not under law anymore.

Surely, removing the obligation to obey God's law will make a person lawless, right? It will make you a law to yourself.

You remove the law, you're going to be lawless. You remove the rules, you're going to be a rebel, aren't you? What on earth are you saying, Paul?

[13 : 45] Why does not being under law but under grace produce a life that pleases God? Why does that happen rather than a life of lawlessness, doing whatever you want?

Why is that? That's our question this morning. Let's approach this humbly, prayerfully, carefully, but also boldly.

Let's go where God's word takes us. Can I urge us to be careful not to say we're not under law and then just sneak the law in the back door going, yeah, we kind of still are.

Let's be careful. Let's not do that if scripture doesn't take us there. But let's also not be careful going, oh, well, Old Testament, who cares?

Let's just be New Testament Christians. Let's be careful of both extremes. So verse 1, Paul states a general principle.

[14 : 57] Verses 2 or 3, we've got an illustration of marriage. Verse 4 is the heart of the reality now if you're a Christian. It's the theological point as a believer.

And in verse 5 and 6, they explain why being under law is a problem. And the result of this change from law to grace isn't lawlessness.

It's actually serving in a completely new way. So that's where we're headed. So come with me, verse 1. Paul is speaking to those who know the law.

Now maybe he's just talking to Jewish Christians, but not necessarily. All Christians are going to be instructed in the Old Testament. We're all going to know the Old Testament. So I think he's saying you ought to know this from the Old Testament.

Here's the principle. The law is binding on a person only as long as he lives, she lives. And then he illustrates the principle with marriage.

[16 : 11] Now it's easy to understand, isn't it? I don't think I have to explain it too much. When a couple stand at the altar, they are making promises to enter into a covenant until death do us part.

That covenant ends at death. The obligation is broken at death. So that's the first point he's illustrating.

It's just the principle. Death breaks the covenant, the obligation. The second point he seems to be making is that if the wife was still, while still married to the husband and the obligation is still in place, she is not free to go to another husband.

Now, don't get distracted by teaching on divorce and stuff. He's making a theological point. There's more that the Bible talks about. Don't get distracted by that.

His point is, once that death breaks the obligation, she is free to have a new husband. So he's making two points.

[17 : 22] I don't think we should get caught up in the detail of this illustration because the point of an analogy is saying these things are like each other and here's my point.

So don't get caught up in the detail. Two points. Death breaks the obligation. You're free to have a new husband.

They're pretty simple points. I suspect he uses the illustration of marriage because it illustrates two covenants.

That's where he's going to go in verse 6. He's using language that we are under a completely new covenant. Now, I can't be sure of that, why he uses the marriage illustration, but definitely to make those two points.

So verse 4. Here's what it means for you, Christian. Here's the reality. Here's what should determine our understanding of the illustration. Likewise, my brothers and sisters, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ.

[18 : 39] In Jesus' body, your obligation to the law has ended. His death has satisfied the condemnation of the law, the curse of the law.

His righteous life has satisfied the requirement to keep the law. His death, because we are in him and we died with him, our obligation is ended.

That covenant is over. Are we floating around now? Are we single? To put it like that. I'm not saying being single is negative, but are we just floating around now?

A law to ourselves? No. That's his second point. The purpose of being released from that first covenant is so that you're bound to a new husband.

So that you may belong to another. You don't belong to yourself. You belong to another. To him who is raised from the dead. In order that we might bear fruit for God.

[19 : 48] The purpose of all this is to have a new husband. A new obligation. He's been raised from the dead, this new husband.

And chapter 6 verse 9 tells us, because of that, he's never going to die again. In other words, this covenant cannot be broken by death. It's permanent.

Going from under law, which can be broken by death, under grace, that covenant, you belong to the resurrected one. It's not going to end. Which is wonderful news.

So why? Why does being under grace and not law produce a life that pleases God rather than just being a law to yourself?

Well, because the point of all that is to belong to another. You've got a new obligation. It's not the law. It's Christ. And his grace produces fruit in us.

[20 : 55] So what's wrong with the law? Why did we need to die to it? This is where verses 5 and 6 give us a summary answer and then the rest of chapter 7, we're going to explore that in the next couple of weeks.

So verse 5, 4, 4, that little word. Here's the reason. Why? We were living in the flesh. And remember, flesh is more than just body for Paul.

It's our flesh is Adam's flesh. We've inherited his sinful nature. So 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.

Whoa. Whoa. Whoa. Whoa. Whoa. Whoa. Whoa. Whoa. The law didn't produce good fruit. Is that not surprising?

It doesn't put sin to sleep. It stirs sin. It wakes it up. It doesn't weaken our sinful passions.

[22 : 08] The law strengthens our sinful passions. That sounds heretical, right? Are you saying the problem is with God's law?

Well, no, and we're going to come to that next week. Nothing wrong with the law. The law is good. It's holy. But the law shows us how deep our problem with sin really is.

The law can't stop our sinful nature. Sinful nature just takes the law and makes us utterly sinful.

Paul's already said, remember, in 5 verse 20. Now the law came in to increase the trespass.

It wasn't a solution to sin. It increases sin. I don't know about you, but I think we all know this from experience even.

[23 : 08] When a wrong habit plagues you, the more you tell yourself it's wrong, it's wrong, it doesn't take the desire away. It can actually increase the desire.

I don't know if that resonates with you or not. You want to get teenagers to do the wrong thing?

Tell them it's wrong. Right? What is that? Something stirs in us. Just say it's wrong. Don't park here. I really want that spot now.

Something happens. Anyway, we'll come to that next week. So why does being under grace and not law produce a life that pleases God and not laws?

Because the law never produces good fruit. It never did. That wasn't the purpose of it. It rouses the sinful nature. And the good news of the gospel is we're dead to that.

[24 : 12] That obligation to the law is over. It need not rouse that sinful nature like it did. And we're in a new situation.

We're in a new covenant. So that's verse 6. For while we were living in the flesh, but now. Here's a new reality now.

We're in a totally new situation after Christ. We're released from the law. No obligation.

Discharged. That covenant is ended. Galatians 3. Didn't put the verse. 23. Talks about being held captive by the law until Christ came.

We're held captive, but not anymore. We're in a new situation. And we serve God in a new way. It doesn't produce being a law to yourself.

[25 : 11] It produces a new way of serving God. It's a totally new way. By the spirit and not by the written code. Paul contrasts the spirit and the written code in 2 Corinthians 3.

You can check that out later. That's clearly talking about the change in the covenants. I think it picks up the promise of the new covenant in Jeremiah 31.

Jeremiah prophesied, I will put my law within them. It's not something external anymore. It's within them, and I'll write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

They shall all know me. From the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. This is a new covenant because Israel broke the old covenant, even though God was like a husband to them.

This is a new covenant. Complete forgiveness. A personal relationship with God. Not just knowing about God, but a personal relationship with God.

[26 : 22] And the law is internal. It changes the heart. The desires within. So why does being under grace and not law produce a life that pleases God rather than lawlessness?

Because having died to the law, we belong to a new husband. We're not just floating around as individuals. We've got a new husband. We're bound to someone else now.

The law never produced good fruit. It was never the solution. And the new covenant, we serve in a completely new way. The way of the Spirit.

And it produces fruit. So, I think it would be easy for us at this point to just declare we're dead to the law and then kind of live and think and relate to God as if to some degree, somehow we're still bound to it.

So, I want to take a step further and ask what Paul is meaning here. He's painting a picture of grace in Romans that is so big.

[27 : 43] Grace is so huge that if you think you need to add law to do the right thing, you just, the problem is you don't have a big enough view of grace. Grace is so everything we need.

A common reformed view follows John Calvin. So, here we go. Let's disagree with John Calvin, shall we? He said that the condemnation of the law is gone for the Christian.

So, definitely say, definitely make it to heaven. Praise God. But then he said, the law is still the believer's rule for life.

Now, I think that creates complexity because we then need to ask, like, what parts of the law still apply? Let's be consistent here. If you're saying it's still the rule for life, like, we're wearing clothes that have two different types of fabric.

Is your conscience eating away at you? Because we've got to be consistent. And a common answer to that question is, well, we have to obey the moral law, but not the civic or the ceremonial.

[29 : 02] So, not the stuff like property damage and all that stuff. We don't have to obey that stuff. We don't have to do the whole sacrifices and priestly system, the ceremonial stuff, but the moral part.

Now, if that's your understanding, don't let me cut across your conscience.

Study Romans and you need to be convinced of it yourself. So, if that's how you think it is, I don't think it goes far enough. And let me explain why.

Paul doesn't qualify. Nowhere does it say that break up the law in terms of these three categories. That's a helpful way to understand what's in the law.

But we're not told that in the New Testament. He doesn't qualify. It's absolute. This old husband, this covenant, gone. Death has broken it. The purpose is to belong to another, not to go back to the law.

[30 : 10] He's using absolute language. Another thing I noticed this week is, we're going to come to it as we study the next few verses next week, but he uses one of the Ten Commandments.

What we, part of the moral law of you shall not covet, he uses that as part of his argument that it does not produce not coveting.

It actually is part of the problem. He uses the moral law as an illustration. But again, we'll come to that next week. I think another way of thinking about this is, Paul is clearly argued that we are not justified by works of the law.

I think he's arguing here, we're not sanctified by works of the law. We don't live the Christian life by works of the law.

So, should the Christian basically avoid reading the Old Testament in favour of the New Testament?

[31 : 17] Is that the implication here? No way. But how we use the Old Testament law has completely changed. All the law helps us understand Christ and the grace we have in him.

Is the law good in knowing God's character, what it means for him to be holy? Yes. We need the law to understand who God beautifully is, what it means for Christ to be holy.

He's holy. So, yes, it's good for that. Is it good for understanding what sin is and the depths of our problem? Yes. The law helps us despair of trying to think we can be good enough for God.

It helps us not go down the road of self-salvation. So, read it. We need that. Does it point forward to the solution?

We need a better priest. We need a better temple. We need a better sacrifice. Yes. It's always pushing towards the solution. You can't understand what Christ has done if we don't understand the Old Testament law.

[32 : 27] Does it give me wisdom to understand what love looks like? Love can look like this and it can look like this in this situation. It gives us wisdom. Yes, it does. But is the law a code that we must live by, a set of rules that God relates to us through, determining our blessing or not based on that, our performance?

I'm going to say absolutely not. That old obligation is gone. So, how we use the law has completely changed. Because Christians, we are to no longer serve in the old way of the written code.

We're to serve in a completely new way of the spirit. Now, I want to go into that now. But we need the rest of 7 and 8, don't we?

The beautiful Romans 8. But I am going to go into it a little bit. I can't help myself. I want to highlight. There's a bit of a contrast between the written code and the spirit.

Just a few things taken from chapter 7 and 8. The written code, rather than giving motivation to fight sin, it just exposes how far short I fall.

[33 : 58] It even arouses sin, Paul says. But the spirit applies what Christ has done to me. I'm in Christ.

I'm in a new family. It gives me every grace. The spirit gives me every grace. And it completely changes the battle with sin.

I'm going to borrow Tim Keller here because he helped me understand. Hopefully he helps you.

When you become a Christian, you don't move from warfare with sin to peace.

That's not the change. You move from a battle you could not win to a new battle which you can't lose.

I love that. Because we're under grace. We can't lose it anymore. It's still a battle.

[34 : 54] We can't lose. The written code says, when I fall back into the same sin this week as I did last week, I deserve condemnation.

Whereas the spirit applying the work of Christ under grace says, no condemnation. My new husband continues to embrace me.

Even though I go after other lovers. Sorry. I do well to cry.

The written code leaves me in a constant state of fear that God isn't pleased with me. At best, he's just putting up with me. The spirit applying the work of Christ to me assures me I'm a love child of God.

Abba, Father. The written code places demands on me on the outside. It says, here's the holy standard.

[36 : 02] You should be here. You should be here. But it provides no help to get there. The spirit applying the work of Christ under grace creates and creates.

We don't do it. He creates a new desire from within. To learn to love the holiness of our new husband. Gives me every right in my weakness.

Hebrews talks about when I'm weak, I have the right to approach the throne of grace for help. We think we can't pray in that moment. No.

We're under grace. You have every right to ask for help. In fact, Romans 8 talks about the spirit is praying for you. Christ is interceding in heaven for you.

The spirit counsels us. Teaching us. Giving us power to fight. The written code says, you've got to keep obeying the rest of your life or else God has the right to remove blessing from you.

[37 : 14] The spirit applying the work of Christ under grace says, God is working all things for your good. Somehow, sovereignly, even your sin.

He's transforming us to be like his son. He's the one transforming us. We've got a part to play in that, but it's down to him in the end.

The written code puts up a mirror to see myself. And I see that I've got a conscience. The law is good. But then I also see that I've got this innate desire to be self-sufficient.

I want to rebel against that. I want to do what I want. That's what the written code does. Shows me who I am. I've got this battle going on. The problem is, they're both me.

That's what the law says. They're both me. Yes, the law is good. I don't love it. Is that who I am? I don't love it. But the spirit has changed me.

[38 : 20] The spirit applies the work of Christ and has created a new inner self. The resurrected me, the real me, now delights in God's law.

Why do I keep on sinning? Because sin is remaining in my sinful flesh. But it's not me, in a sense. It's sin. The fundamental me has changed. It's a new battle.

And the spirit gives hope that we cannot lose this battle in the end because our sinful flesh will be raised to be like Christ's glorious body. We will win this battle.

It's two completely different ways of serving. One's under law. One's under grace in Christ. I just want to finish by saying how great is our God that he doesn't want to relate to us through his good law.

What brings us together to God, what he wants the focus of our relationship to be, what he wants us to see in him and receive from him, it's not our performance.

[39 : 37] But his super abounding grace. He wants us to be. He wants us to be. That's what brings you together. Super abounding. It's like a flood has been unleashed.

A tsunami of grace. He wants us to be. He wants us to be. He wants us to be. He wants us to be.

He wants us to be. He wants our dependence on his grace. He isn't concerned on our performance.

He wants our praise. He isn't wanting us to try harder. He wants our thankfulness. We have a grace-mediated relationship with God.

That's how he wants us to see him. And no other religion comes even close to this God. Romans 8 verse 3.

For God has done, done, he's done. What the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do by sending his own son.

[40 : 48] Instead of living in fear of never measuring up to God's law, we can fall into the arms of our new husband. Thanks be to God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, that we are not under law.

We are under grace. Let's pray to God. Oh Lord, we believe Satan's lie in the garden that you are not good.

That you want us to relate through law. When you created us by grace and you've saved us by grace, please help us to grasp the gospel more deeply through your word.

So that we might just see the world of grace we now live in. Do this because we know that that honors you and will produce a life that pleases you.

I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.