

"Belonging to Another" Romans 7:1–6

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[0 : 0 0] We oftentimes justify and excuse and embrace the events or situations or the people in our lives that have caused us distress and harm.

! Why do we do this? Why do we struggle with the truth? The reality of naming the very thing that is causing us pain and therefore look for a remedy, look for a solution.

The Apostle Paul will describe our relationship with sin using a new metaphor in our section. And in doing so, he will help us see that the freedom that is promised by sin is no freedom at all, but actually a captivity.

And we would do well with understanding it for what it is and not making peace with it, or even worse, justifying it and living not according to the truth, but according to the lie.

That sin promises freedom, but instead it makes our wills captive, takes our wills captive. So, the question I'm going to ask you this morning, have you developed a Stockholm Syndrome with sin?

[1 : 1 1] Have you become sympathetic to your captor? As we open up Romans 7, and we're just looking at the first six verses, verses 1 to 6, we're going to take a look at two different aspects of the text.

The first is the bondage that Paul describes, and then secondly, the belonging that Paul describes. Bondage and belonging. We'll jump right into it this morning, looking at verses 1, 2, 3.

This is what the Apostle Paul says, Or do you not know, brothers and sisters, 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. Paul continues his lesson on the relationship between the Christian and grace, and the Christian and the law.

[2 : 3 2] He has done so since chapter 5. We're not going to do a recap, but chapters 5, 6, and 7 are really Paul's explanation on how we are to live in light of sin as Christians, how we are to live in light of the law as Christians.

And he is seeking to answer the question, how then are we to live in light of what Christ has done? Paul has come across as being very negative towards the law thus far.

He has said that the law defines what sin is, that the law convicts us of sin, and actually that the law reveals the wrath of God against sin in us.

The law is even said, we'll see later on in verse 5, to arouse sin in us. Paul sums it all up in chapter 6, verse 14, when he says that because we are no longer under the law, sin no longer has dominion over us.

So Paul, over these past few chapters, these past few verses, he has connected the law to sin, to death, to all sorts of oppression.

[3 : 4 5] But how can Paul say what he says about the law? We'll just back up a little bit. Paul is a very devout, learned Jewish man. He knows the scriptures. He is very learned.

He studied under some of the best rabbis of his day. He would have been immersed in the scriptures from a very young age. So therefore, how can Paul say what he says about the law? When we have Psalm 19, for instance, where King David talks of the law, not in just kind of neutral terms, but he is gushing over the law.

I'll just read a portion of Psalm 19, starting in verse 7. This is King David. The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul.

The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. Verse 8. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.

The rules of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. Moreover, verse 11. By them is your servant warned. In keeping them, that is the law, there is great reward.

[4 : 56] That is a completely different way to approach the law. What is happening with the Apostle Paul? Is he forgetting or disavowing everything that he has learned?

All the scriptures that affirm what the law is? Who gave the law? One of the very important rules when you read the scriptures, an interpretive rule, is that you ought not to read one part of scripture in such a way that negates another part of scripture.

We understand the scriptures as a cohesive unit, written by many writers over many centuries, but all inspired by the Holy Spirit, guided their pens, their quills, guided by the Holy Spirit, guided by God, therefore there is a unity in message and a coherence in the scriptures.

So then, how do we approach what Paul is saying here? If that's the case. So previously, Paul has, he has used similar language, like I've mentioned before, to describe the law, likening it to sin, or to the old self, to death and to unrighteousness, all of which we have been freed from the power of under Christ with the free gift of grace that God has given us in his son.

So, why does Paul then include the law in this? And this is, I think, an important part as we get into the rest of this text, and it is this reason. Because the law among other uses, and the law has more than just one use, but the law among its other uses, is the means God uses to open our eyes to the sinful and depraved reality that is the human heart.

[6 : 50] The human heart has a bent towards evil and selfishness and a self-serving aspect of life.

The human heart, the unregenerated human heart, the human heart that is riddled with sin, it is one that can never truly choose good for good's sake.

There's always a utilitarian aspect to choosing good. It has to be for our benefit. The human heart is a sinful one. And the law is God's way that he helps us to open our eyes to this reality.

So, to be under the law, and by the way, I'll just say that's a very good thing, okay? That's a good use of the law. That's God-given. So therefore, to be under the law is to understand that we aren't sinners because we sin, but we sin because we are sinners.

And that's a very, very, very important distinction. We're not sinners because we sin. We sin because we are sinners. And this is what the law does. It helps us to understand this reality.

[8 : 00] And more so that we cannot break away from this reality. We are bound to it. We are held captive to it. This is what Paul is referring to here.

He is not contradicting David in Psalm 19. The law is also part of God's revelation of himself to us. It is a picture of what just living ought to be.

Remember the Ten Commandments, which I would assume that everybody, I mean, would affirm, the vast majority of the Ten Commandments anyways, whether they're Christians or not Christians. It is a universal that murder is a bad thing. Okay? That stealing is unjust. That bearing false witness is not something to be celebrated.

The law is a very good thing. However, the law here in chapter 7 seems to be a shorthand for our utter inability to overcome our propensity to sin, reminding us that we sin because we are sinners.

[9 : 06] We cannot live righteously. And our ultimate destiny is not heaven, but hell. We are bound by sin.

We cannot master it. In fact, it masters us. We are bound to the understanding of how sinful we are without an ability to truly remedy our situation.

It is, what Paul is saying here, shorthand to say, we are we are completely hopeless in and of ourselves to remedy the problem of sin.

So, returning to the metaphor in verses 2 and 3, Paul draws our attention to the fact that we are bound to the law for all our living days. Just as a wife is bound to her husband as long as she lives, if she wants to pursue another lover, she cannot do so without committing adultery.

The marital union is binding, Paul is saying, which is language used to describe a ruling over or a lording over, almost an imperial authority.

[10 : 15] And I'm not going to make a comment on that's the nature of marriage, but the language used is not an optional union, but it is one that is binding upon the person.

And this binding cannot be unbound save for death. So, I'm going to pause just briefly here. The text isn't in any way a definitive section in scripture on marriage and divorce.

There are other passages in scripture that will shed more light on it. That's kind of the thrust of other scriptures, not this one. Here, Paul assumes that the readers, both Jewish and non-Jewish, understand the legalities of marriage.

marriage. But for us, this could be a very hard teaching. I think it's a hard teaching because we have had successive generations where, here in Canada, where no-fault divorce has been the, essentially the law of the land.

At least since 1968, that was when Parliament introduced and passed the Divorce Act and it was amended to expand or maybe not expand but to limit the scope of what was legitimate divorce.

[11 : 32] It basically opened up no-fault divorce to be the prevailing sentiment of what it meant to be married or how to end one's marriage. So, divorce has been a part of our Canadian existence for successive generations.

and I would wager that everybody here, either explicitly or implicitly, has felt divorce. Whether it's directly, you're a child of divorce or you've been through divorce yourself, or you have family members, you have friends, you have co-workers, divorce is very prevalent and therefore it's unbelievably sensitive.

So, again, this is an aside from the text, I just think it's an important thing to address. Divorce is tragic. It's tragic. There's no instance where it ought to be celebrated, although sometimes it is necessary.

The scripture holds marriage up as a lifelong sacred and honorable institution, but in doing so, what the scripture doesn't do is give license for abuse or adultery.

so lawful divorce has always been by death, but the church has understood that there are kinds of death that warrant a divorce.

[12 : 57] Again, tragic, but nevertheless, and we can talk about this at coffee, outside if you want, or send me an email if I've touched a raw nerve. I'm happy to either weather a bit of a tirade against me for what I've said or to help you walk through some difficult times.

I'm here for you. But it's always been abandonment, adultery, and abuse as forms of death that have warranted a lawful but tragic reason for a couple to end their marriage.

Okay, that's the aside. Let's get back into the text. Back to the metaphor. Paul is helping us see that the law is so binding, and this is what he's really trying to get at here, that the law is so binding upon us that our only way out is to die, which is a very terribly high price to pay, one we cannot pay, and also still enjoy the benefits of freedom.

We will either live bound to the law or be dead and free from it. Once again, we find ourselves in a hopeless conundrum. Paul will now turn to, from the metaphor to the lesson, and this will bring us to our second point where Paul speaks of belonging.

So, not bondage, but belonging. Look with me at verse 4, and just the first part of verse 4. Likewise, so again, he is moving from the metaphor to the lesson.

[14 : 26] Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law. So, did you catch the shift in the metaphor here? In verses 2 and 3, when Paul is explaining or at least setting the table for explaining the lifelong binding of the law, he talks about freedom only coming when the husband dies.

And yet, here, in verse 4, the death Paul describes is the wife's death, which he extends to the Christians. Paul is saying, in the previous section, the wife is free when her husband dies, but here, in verse 4, he says, we were previously married to the law and under its rule, and then we died to that.

It's a slight shift, and we'll touch on it, elaborate on it in a bit, in a bit closer to the end, but just stick a pin in that for me, okay? Stick a pin in that. But the law, it hasn't died, has it?

Paul says, we have died, and this is still problematic if we want to be free from the power of the law. And again, shorthand for the power of sin and our inability to transcend sin.

It's problematic because we have established that although such a death will unbind us from the law, we are still hopeless for we have died and we can't enjoy life apart from it. How is this good news?

[15 : 53] Because ultimately Paul is moving towards good news here. Let's continue on and read a bit more of chapter four, of verse four. likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ so that you may belong to another.

I'll just pause really quickly. Through, okay, this is a small word in the Greek, but its impact is immeasurable.

Paul is saying, likewise, my brothers, and that's short for my brothers and sisters, you also have died to the law, but you yourself haven't died just by yourself to die and to never rise again, but you have died through the body of Christ.

We looked at this back in chapter six, the first part of chapter six. Paul, he's already taught on this, we're not going to return to it, but really he's returning to this idea to underscore the force of this reality, that we have truly died, but we have died through Christ.

It's a real death so that we are fully released and unbound from sin, death, and carnal living, and that if we have been united to him in his death, that means we will be united to him in his resurrection, which is to say that we can be unbound from the law and yet live, and yet continue to live.

[17:23] Again, the best we can do is die, be unbound from the law, and then that's it. But Paul is saying, hold on, if you have died through Christ, it means you can live again, unbound from the law, live in freedom from the law, and all of a sudden we start to see that the death and resurrection of Christ, it definitely is for the forgiveness of our sins, but it is unbelievably complex, but in a good way, God's redemption for us is true freedom, and it is a freedom that is completely outside of us, something that we could never get on our own.

We get to enjoy being unbound to the law, we get to enjoy true freedom in Christ, but it's not a freedom where we can just go on with full autonomy, commanding our own destiny, building our own empire, no, Paul says it is for a purpose, and what is that purpose?

We're going to look back at verse 4 and finish off the verse, but he will talk about two purposes, and see if you can pick them out as we read. Verse 4, What is the purpose?

So that we will have a new spouse, so that we will belong to another, the one who has raised us from the dead, the one who had all authority, but he did not use it to lord it over us, but instead used it to lay down his life so that we could be free from the law.

And Paul says for the purpose of us belonging to him. And here's the unbelievable, I'll say it, it's later on in my notes, but I'll say it now, this is the unbelievable reality of this, is that we get it confused, okay?

[19:34] We think that the life where we get to enjoy everything whenever we want it, this is the life of freedom, but to live under the lordship and belonging to Christ as if I'm not my own person, this sounds like bondage, but the scriptures are saying, no, no, no, no, you're getting it wrong, okay?

You are seeing your captor, sin, as your savior, and you're seeing Christ as the one who is constraining you and binding you up so that you can't truly live.

Paul is saying you're getting it wrong. You might have Stockholm syndrome. The second purpose is that we would bear fruit for God.

So we're still obligated to keep the law, but not as people under the bondage of sin, but as free people. So in Christ, we can love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

We can love our neighbor as ourselves, and we can do so and therefore fulfill the law and the prophets. So now what we see is not the bondage of keeping the law, which we can never keep, that just, if anything, it just shows us how sinful we are.

[21:01] Instead, it becomes a privilege. privilege. It's a privilege so that we are accepted by God, and then we have the privilege of serving Him, and we won't twist that so that we think we're serving God, and then one day, maybe, if we try hard enough, we will be accepted by Him.

We get to operate from a place of acceptance. This is why there is truly no hope in trying to fix ourselves.

by ourselves. We cannot avoid death by trying to maximize our life. It is a fool's errand.

We need outside help. We see this especially in verse 5, because Paul's going to return to this image of sin being our captor.

And this is what he says in verse 5. For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions aroused by the law, we're at work in our members to bear fruit for death.

[22:08] Paul is saying you can't manage your flesh. You can't fix your flesh. Your flesh is rotting off your bones. You are prone every waking hour, every minute, breathing in and out sin.

Remember, you sin because you are a sinner, Paul is saying. And it's not just that we sin every now and then as if our life is like a river.

And then every now and then, maybe every couple years, there's a flood. Okay, we can manage that flood. All right? Sandbags. Eventually, the water recedes. We're okay. It doesn't happen too often. When it happens, it's a bit messy.

We can fix it. Instead, he is almost saying that we are like a dam, and there's a raging river or raging body of water behind it.

And this dam is just full of fissures and cracks. The concrete is starting to flake away. And it's not just a few patches that's going to fix it.

[23 : 11] It's about to burst. And you patch this hole only for this one to shoot out a jet of water. There's no hope to patch up this dam. And Paul is saying, listen, if you try to patch it up, it's futile.

This is why we can't fix ourselves. We are captive by our flesh. We serve our own interests, our own desires, and appetites, and they are not towards the good.

We will always find a way to contravene a law if our hearts are married to sin and to death. This is why we need to be freed from the law, freed from the power of sin and death upon our lives, freed from our spouse of death.

We need a new husband. And it's remarkable then that the Christian faith is described in such a way where it is not merely a contract, but it is this deep, intimate, loving relationship that is extended to us.

where our allegiances change. This relationship is marked by deep and lasting love and expressed in a loving, uncompelled sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

[24 : 33] Again, how unbelievably loving is it that Christ would lay down his life not because he was paying his own debt, but somebody else's. was he compelled to?

Was he lacking in anything and then he needed to do the hero thing to make himself elevate to the very nth degree? No, no, no, no. It was all uncompelled sacrificial love.

And the reality is that all who have put their faith and trust in Christ means that we are free, but at the same time we are now his. And no area of our life is untouched.

And friends, if that is a scary thing, just remember what I said previously. Let us not get twisted up the reality of thinking sin is freedom and Christ is bondage.

It is the opposite. He offers us freedom. I said this last week and I've said it a number of times over the years. One of the colleagues we pray in morning prayer says service to you is perfect freedom.

[25 : 42] Instead, we think freedom is found in the tyranny of our self-obsession, of our appetites, that do not bear fruit to God. But what does it say?

In verse 5, that bear fruit that leads to death. You see the loss of freedom and independence in a marriage and therefore, if we're going to continue to extend this metaphor to Christ and our relationship with him, it is not a burden to bear but a joy to embrace.

Look with me at verse 6. And this is, we'll wrap it up. Verse 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, which is to say the law.

Independence! God, I'm going to be here to I'm going to There is no freedom from our appetites. There's no freedom from envy or hatred or resentment. There's no freedom from self-congratulation and then self-doubt. There's only captivity. There's only bondage.

[27 : 08] But in Christ, Paul says, we have belonging. We have belonging. We have a new husband. We are a part of Christ's church.

The bride. And he is our bridegroom. And we are free to serve. We do not serve to be freed. Again, an unbelievable difference.

But, there's always a but. But, why do we then continue in sin if this is such an incredible gift given to us? Why do we struggle to see Christ as our liberator and to view our flesh as problematic? Why do we still suffer from the spiritual Stockholm syndrome? Why? Why do we suffer from this?

As I mentioned earlier, Paul shifts a detail in the metaphor so that the woman is free once her husband dies, which means we, and in this case, in the metaphor, we are the wife, that we die, freeing us from the husband who is still alive, which is death.

So, even though we are dead to the law, which is to say the bondage and condemnation and mastery of sin and death over our lives, sin and death still are alive.

[28 : 29] Sin and death have not yet died. we understand that what Christ did on the cross truly was defeated sin and death. Sin and death, they're a defeated foe, but they are not yet dispatched.

And therefore, the Christian life, as Paul has described it, is not coming to Christ and then we have a victory lap until we die or Christ comes back again, but rather it's a civil war within our hearts because our old master, who does not own us anymore, still calls us and beckons us and we listen, we are conditioned to listen.

That we have been freed from that terrible relationship that we were once in and yet, they call us back and we are somehow in our hearts drawn back like a hunk of metal to a strong magnet.

But the promise in scripture is this, that although sin and death are still alive and roaring, they are ultimately a defeated foe, even more, there will be a time, the scripture says, and you can read it in Revelation chapter 20, where even sin and death itself will be thrown into the lake of fire, will be done away with, dispatched forever.

death will die. It's a very incredible thing to ponder and to meditate upon. The abuser will abuse no more. Eternity will indeed be utopic, but not in the weird utopias where we watch movies where we're just waiting for the facade to fall down and for heaven to eventually look like hell, but really, truly a utopia of utopias, where sin and death do not exist any longer.

[30 : 25] You see, Jesus has uprooted death and has judged it to be destroyed, and he will indeed do so, for he has already destroyed its power by dying on the cross and rising again, and because we are in him, because we have died with Christ, because we will rise with Christ, because he truly rose, because we belong to him, we are part of his bride, he is our bridegroom, his victory will be our victory, in fact, it is our victory now.

So friends, do not go back to what was, but rather flee and flock to the lover of your soul, the one who doesn't just speak sweet words of promise, but displays unbelievably sacrificial actions by dying in your place.

Friends, he is the lover of our souls, he is the one who purifies us and glorifies us so that we will enjoy his presence forever. And friends, that is the gospel of Christ.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.