

Till Death Did Us Part, Romans 7:1-6, Galatians 4:4-7

*Adapted from: Romans—A Gospel Shaped Life, Till Death Do Us Part.
Pastor Pat Damiani, Thornydale Family Church, Tucson AZ. October 23, 2016.*

Last week I ran across a website titled **Christian Memes That Are Funny Because They're True.** I thought I'd share a few of them with you this morning.

[Show memes]

This last one is particularly relevant this morning:

[But officer, I'm under grace, not law]



No matter how true this statement might be theologically. I'm pretty sure that it isn't going to work in this situation.

But this is what the book of Romans is all about: law and grace. Specifically, it is about how God through the life and death of Jesus Christ, has graciously rescued us from our own death penalty under the law, so that we might live for him (Romans 6:23).

since **all have sinned** and fall short of the glory of God; **they are now JUSTIFIED by his GRACE as a gift,** through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus ... [made] effective through [our] **FAITH.**
(Romans 3:23-24)

When we put our faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ, God is able to do for us what we could never accomplish through our own failed efforts: saving us from spiritual death and transforming us into living children of God. How God accomplishes this in our life is by the way He justifies and then sanctifies us.

So, for the first five chapters of Romans the Apostle Paul has explained **justification**, which is a legal procedure by which God can declare us "righteous" by crediting Christ's substitutionary death to our account. Remember "**grace**" is getting what we do not deserve. Crediting Christ's righteousness to us is truly an act of grace.

Then, beginning in chapter six, Paul shifts to explaining that our **sanctification**, comes from God now working in us—an ongoing process—to remake us into the righteous people He had previously declared us to be. **To be "sanctified" literally means to be set apart for God's use; to become holy, useful for service to God.**

And the key to our sanctification, our being made holy, is that having been spiritually united with Christ in both his death and resurrection; we also have died to the power of sin and have been released from the law; so that we are now free to live for God.

So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus....

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

Romans 6: 11&14

Thus last week we learned that one part of our sanctification is that our death and resurrection with Christ, has freed us from the power of **sin** to condemn or control us. So now, with the help of God's indwelling Holy Spirit, we have the power to control (to cage) any remaining sinful habits from our former lives and to begin living righteous, sanctified, lives as children of God.

This week Paul teaches us a second aspect of our sanctification: just as sin no longer enslaves us so also the Law no longer binds us. With our death and resurrection with Christ we have also died to the Law that formerly condemned us, again freeing us to live for God. We are, as Paul phrases it, *no longer under law but under grace.*

But just what exactly does it mean to no longer be living under the law but under grace? Let's explore this today.

First, remember that Paul was writing to Jewish Christians who had been taught to hold the Law of Moses in very high regard. In fact, some held it in such high regard that **they had made an idol out of it, essentially worshiping the Law rather than the Law-giver.** That is why Paul had to devote so much of his letter to explaining why it is not possible for us to be reckoned as righteous before God by adhering to the Law.

For 'no human being will be justified in [God's] sight by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.

Romans 3.20

Then anticipating the objections that his readers would raise to this idea of obtaining salvation solely by faith in God's grace without the law, Paul devoted this next portion of his letter to explaining what it means to live under grace and not under the law.

So let's see what Paul teaches us about Law versus Grace

WHY WE LIVE UNDER GRACE, NOT THE LAW

1. The law is only binding as long as I live

Paul begins by stating the obvious fact that **earthly laws are only binding on a person as long as he or she is alive.** This is a truth which is sadly demonstrated far too often in our own culture.

Last year when Micah Johnson intentionally ambushed and killed five Dallas police officers, he was never charged, arrested, or convicted for any of those crimes because he was killed in a standoff with the police. Once he died, Johnson was released from power of U.S. law to impose any penalties on him (July 7, 2016).

In chapter seven, Paul illustrated this truth using the Jewish law for marriage. By this law two people are legally bound together as husband and wife as long they both are alive. And while our modern culture has dramatically changed its thinking on this matter, usually our wedding vows still make the same assumption, containing phrases like "**til death do us part**" or "**as long as we both shall live.**" But now, just as then, with the death of one partner the remaining spouse is freed, no longer bound by the law of marriage.

WHY WE LIVE UNDER GRACE, NOT THE LAW

- 1. The law is only binding as long as I live**
- 2. I died to the law through Jesus**

Then, in verse four, Paul goes on to explain that **everyone who is "in Christ" has with Christ's death been freed from the law in the same way that a husband or wife is freed by the death of his or her spouse.** He says this because the law declares that *the wages of sin is death* (Romans 6:23). And with Jesus I died which satisfies and releases me from the law thereafter.

Here Paul has returned to the idea he first expressed in chapter six. When we place our faith in Jesus **we are united together with Him so intimately that His death on the cross becomes our death to sin and to the Law.** And his resurrection to new life also frees us to live in "newness of life"

But as we also saw in chapter six, **just because we've been freed from the power of sin and the Law, doesn't mean we can now freely sin. We have been freed from sin and the Law so we can live for God**

This is what it means to be no longer under the law but under GRACE.

WHY WE LIVE UNDER GRACE, NOT THE LAW

- 1. The law is only binding as long as I live**
- 2. I died to the law through Jesus**
- 3. Therefore, I am free to live in a love relationship rather than a law relationship**

Paul goes on, in verse five, to remind us that while we still lived "*in the flesh*," that **the Law actually incited our sinful passions resulting in the kind of fruit that only brings death**. The idea is that in our fallen, spiritually dead state, the Law--rather than restraining us--sometimes paradoxically encourages us to sin even more. And if we try to go back to living under the Law that is probably what will happen again, isn't it?

Let me illustrate. If you were to walk by a freshly painted handrail where the paint still looked wet, you probably wouldn't touch it. But if somebody puts up a sign that says "Wet Paint--Do Not Touch" how many of you would feel tempted to touch that rail just because that sign is there?

Or, have you ever been driving on an unfamiliar road not knowing what the speed limit is because you haven't seen any signs? You tend at those times to drive pretty carefully, maybe even well below the actual speed limit. But what happens as soon as you see the speed limit sign? You immediately figure that you can get away with going at least five miles per hour over the posted speed limit. Right?

So dying to the Law as a result of being united with Jesus frees me up from that tendency of the Law to actually arouse my sinful passions and also frees me to live in a loving rather than a law-bound relationship with God.

you also have died to the law
through the body of Christ,
so that you may belong to him
who has been raised from the dead,
in order that we may bear fruit for God...

Romans 7:4)

Having been freed from the law by God's grace, we are now also free to live for God out of love rather than serving the Law out of obligation. In a sense, according to Paul's wedding illustration, the Law was our old husband and now Jesus is our new husband. So, instead of being married to the demanding, unloving, uncaring, impersonal husband of the law, our death has freed us up to be united to a loving, caring, eternally alive person: Jesus. And where we had formerly lived a life that led to death ("*bore fruit for death*"). Now we can live in newness of life "*bearing fruit for God*" (7:4-5).

Now, as we will see in a moment, just because we have been released from the Law doesn't mean that it no longer serves any other purpose in our lives. But it is certainly clear here that **the reason Jesus came to this earth was to enable us to enter into a love relationship with Him and His Father, not just to help us keep the law better.**

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.
(Romans 7:4-6 E.S.V.)

This means that if I am in a genuine love relationship with Jesus, I won't ever have the attitude of "*what rules do I have to abide by*" or "*How little can I do and still be a good Christian?*" Instead, **I will live as a "Lover of God"** (*the bride of Christ*) and serve others the best of my ability out of gratitude for what Jesus has done for me. And **that is how I serve in the new way of the Spirit!**

So now, let's see how practical we can make this idea of being released from the law to live for the love of God.

WHAT BEING "RELEASED FROM THE LAW" MEANS AND DOES NOT MEAN

1. It means I am free from the demands of the Law as a requirement for approaching God

Almost every religion, including some that call themselves "Christian", are based on the idea that the only way we can be reckoned as righteous before God (earn our salvation) is through obedience to a **system of rules and performance.** And frankly that is a terrifying way to live because how can you ever be sure that you have ever done enough to earn God's favor?

But as Romans repeatedly teaches us **justification**—being made right with God—is “**By GRACE alone through FAITH alone,**” which was Martin Luther’s Reformation battle-cry. There is nothing that I can do, including trying to keep the law, that could ever earn God’s favor.

Now, here in chapter seven, Paul reveals that we are not only justified by grace alone, but that **we are also sanctified, not by our continued attempts to keep the Law on our own, but rather in the same way we are justified—by grace through faith.**

So, because my relationship with God is not dependent at all on anything I can do, dying to the Law frees me up from the guilt and the worry of trying to approach God based on anything I do or don’t do. And that is such a great way to live!

WHAT BEING “RELEASED FROM THE LAW” MEANS AND DOES NOT MEAN

1. It means I am free from the demands of the Law as a requirement for approaching God
2. It means that I don’t measure “spiritual maturity” based on adherence to the Law

Now here is a really important application: **Being freed from the Law also means that I am freed from measuring my own or any other’s maturity by the Law, which is a trap we too often fall into.**

- One **way I trap myself is by measuring my own spiritual maturity by the Law.** It is so easy to fall into this trap of reducing our relationship with Jesus to some set of rules. When we do that usually one of two things can happen.
 - At one extreme, **we can be deceived into thinking that we are spiritually mature** because we’ve checked all the boxes on our “spiritual to-do list” when the reality is that we really don’t know Jesus any better than we did a month ago or a year ago or five years ago
 - OR at the other extreme, **we beat ourselves up because we are not living up to our own self-imposed laws;** because we didn’t read our Bible one day or we missed church one Sunday or failed to engage in some other spiritual discipline. Neither of these extremes is healthy.

- A second way that we get caught in this trap is by **evaluating the spiritual maturity of others based on how well they adhere to our personal list of rules**. Jesus often condemned the Pharisees for doing such, and we also need to evaluate our own lives to make sure that we're not doing the same thing. **While I don't think that any of us intentionally seeks to be a Pharisee, it is so easy to slip into this trap of judging another's Christianity by my own personal convictions, which was very much on display this past election season.**

There is no doubt that this past--and apparently still continuing--election season has caused a real dilemma for Christians who, while earnestly seeking the will of God, still came to different conclusions about what they believed God was leading them to do. Even among Bedford's Ministerial pastors there was a wide range of convictions about how each planned to vote. And that was to be expected because, while we have some broad principles in Scripture that ought to guide how we vote, we certainly don't have any specific guidance about how to vote; especially in an election like this previous one where there really were no good choices.

Now, understand that there is nothing wrong for you as a Christian with making a choice of candidates, passionately supporting that candidate, and even trying to persuade others to vote for your candidate. But the problem comes when we judge someone else's spiritual maturity based on our personal convictions. Several times I have read or heard statements that either outright claimed or at least implied that my standing as a "good Christian," was dependent on whom I chose to vote for or not vote for.

We need to be very careful not to judge the spiritual maturity of others based on complex outward measures such as politics or which ministries or programs that person does or does not support.

WHAT BEING "RELEASED FROM THE LAW" MEANS AND DOES NOT MEAN

1. It means I am free from the demands of the Law as a requirement for approaching God
2. It means that I don't measure "spiritual maturity" based on adherence to the Law
3. It does not mean I am free from the moral requirements of the Law

Third, dying to the law does not mean that we are no longer obligated to keep the specific moral commandments in the law. If that were the case, why

then would Jesus, Paul, and the other New Testament writers often reinforce the moral requirements of the Law and even expand on them. But **what has changed is the way I attempt to adhere to these requirements. As Paul reminds us in verse six, we serve in the new way of the Spirit.** Just as we are freed from our enslavement to sin, but not from the consequences of any continued sinful living, so also while the Law no longer condemns us before God, we can still get a ticket if we speed.

WHAT BEING "RELEASED FROM THE LAW" MEANS AND DOES NOT MEAN

1. It means I am free from the demands of the Law as a requirement for approaching God
2. It means that I don't measure "spiritual maturity" based on adherence to the Law
3. It does not mean I am free from the moral requirements of the Law
4. It does not mean that "good works" have no place

And finally, it does not mean that "good works" have no place in our lives.

While our good works obviously don't earn us favor with God, they still have an important place in the life of a Christian. As we've seen frequently here in Romans, **serving God, serving others, and bearing fruit for God are the evidence that we have genuinely committed our lives to God through faith in Jesus.** This is an idea that you will continue to see Paul develop as he moves on through Romans.

Living in bondage to the Law is a frustrating, defeating, and miserable way to live life because no matter how hard we try we will never measure up to any set of rules. But the good news is that if we'll allow the Law—as it was intended to do—to lead us to Jesus and we place our faith in Him, He has promised to release us from that burden of trying to justify ourselves before God so that he can draw us into a loving relationship with Himself.