

FREEDOM FROM LAW

Romans 7:1-25
Key verse 7:4

Lesson 7

"So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God."

Law was a precious gift which God gave Moses for the people of Israel when they desperately needed life direction and training. They had just come out of 400 years of slavery in Egypt, and though they were free from the chains of Egypt, the slave mentality of Egypt still bound them. They could sing and dance and praise God for destroying Pharaoh and his army and opening a way through the Red Sea for them; then, 3 days later, they could forget all about it and grumble and complain and rebel against God's servant, threatening to go back to Egypt because they were hungry. The mark of a slave mentality is the lack of a thankful heart; no sense of history; lots of grumbling and complaining; a great interest in small physical pleasures and bodily comforts.

In Exodus 20-31 God gave Moses the Law. The core of the law is the 10 Commandments. The covenant ceremony in Exodus 24 was like a marriage ceremony which bound them to God to be his own people. - The Law was the centerpiece of the covenant. It was given so that they might be trained to overcome their slave mentality and grow into a holy nation and a kingdom of priests.

The problem was, the Israelites broke their covenant relationship with God. They worshiped idols. They could not keep the law because of their sinful Human nature. So the law became an unbearable burden and a cruel taskmaster who could not save them; it only condemned them .

When we are set free from slavery to sin through our union with Christ, we are also set free from bondage to law. Does this mean that the law has become obsolete for a Christian, and we can ignore it? Does the law have any function in a Christian's life? First of all, we are freed from the law so that we might belong to Jesus and bear fruit to God.

1. To bear fruit to God (1-6)

Paul uses an illustration from marriage to teach us our new relationship to the law, and our relationship to Jesus. Paul himself once married the Law because he thought this would make him a great man; he thought this would make his life fruitful and happy. So he pledged commitment to the Law. His commitment was like a

marriage. So he became "Mrs. Law and the law was 'Mr. Law.' She did her best for Mr. Law, but he was never satisfied. He only pointed out her weaknesses and made increasingly greater demands on her and condemned her for this and that. There was no good fruit--only fruit for death. She regretted her marriage, but she couldn't get away from him because she was bound by the law of marriage. She was a slave to Mr. Law. Only death could set Mrs. Law free.

According to the law of marriage, only death sets a person free to marry another. Such a death occurred when I accepted the gospel and died with Jesus. Paul says in verse 4, "So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead in order, that we might bear fruit to God." Because we died with Christ, our bondage to law is broken. We are no longer under the law; we are married to our true husband Jesus. The purpose of this union is to bear beautiful and joyful fruit to God. We do not serve Jesus in the old way, according to the written code, but in the new way of the Spirit.

We died to the law through the body of Christ so that we might belong to Jesus. We became his most precious and beloved ones, his brides. But Christ sacrificed his very life on the cross in order to make this new relationship with us. Our relationship with Christ is possible when we make a life commitment to him who died for us. He gives us a clear destination for our lives, the kingdom of heaven. How sorrowful it is to see so many people who don't commit themselves to God. They don't even commit themselves to their wives or husbands or children. Psalm 1 says that they are like chaff blown by the wind, Let's not be like chaff; let's take root in Jesus and be built up, and bear fruit to God.

2. The function of the Law (7-24)

These days many people have an attitude toward life which resembles very much the slave mentality. They brag about living naturally. They say, "If it feels good, do it", and "Do what ever you think is right." Like the lawless slaves just out of Egypt, they have no life direction, no sense of responsibility, and an unconditionally rebellious attitude toward all authority. Such people think they are free, but actually, they are slaves. Slave-class people have no law of marriage. Men and women enjoy free sex, but men take no responsibility for women they use, and women want no responsibility for human life created by their thoughtless actions.

In Chapter 6, Paul said that we are under grace not under law--but this by no means gives us license to follow our natural desires and live lawless lives. Rather, we must grow in holiness (19). To grow in holiness requires struggle with sin and Satan. The law serves two purposes: first, it helps us know what sin is so that we can repent; second, it helps us struggle so that we can grow in holiness.

a. The law is holy and good (7-13)

God's law is not sinful. God's law is holy and just, righteous and good. It exposes sin as sin. Most of the laws concern our actions; but the 10th commandment, "Do not covet" concerns the inner motives. Covetousness comes from an ungrateful heart. I want something that belongs to someone else. This means that I am not content with what God has given me. I am dissatisfied with the life God has called me to live. Covetousness can cause a person to steal or murder or commit adultery. It is a refusal to accept the sovereignty of God in one's practical life. Much of the violence and unrest in our society is caused by covetousness. The so-called "rights" movements are, for the most part, rooted in covetousness. God's law says "Do not covet." When I examine my heart, grumbling or ingratitude or the competitive spirit that arises from time to time is a violation of this law. Perhaps this is why Paul wrote the Christians in Thessalonica, "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." (1Th 5:16-18) A thankful heart is not an option for a Christian. It is obligatory if one is to obey the command, "Do not covet."

Paul found that he could not obey this law. The harder he tried to do so, the more impossible it was. He found that the law makes us aware of sin, that is, it brings sin to life. But the law has no power to solve the sin problem. So the law makes us fatalistic and leads us to despair. Paul wrote, "sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death." So "the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death."

So, the first function of the law is to expose sin and make me know that I am a sinner. I must know that I am a sinner so that I may know my need for a Savior.

b. The law makes me struggle and grow (14-24)

The law exposes the fact that I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. It shows me that I must fight with my slave mentality. Verses 14-25 are written in the present tense. Paul is not just talking about his present situation; nor is he talking only about his past, pre-Christian life. He is stating a general principle that is true about all of us. As long as we are in the flesh we must struggle with our sinful human nature. Paul says, "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do." (15) He continues, "In my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind..." Tension and inner conflict are not necessarily bad. As we grow in Christ, the Bible shows us new areas of life that need to be cleansed of sin by the blood of Jesus. We must continue to fight sin in our lives in order to grow in faith and in holiness and in Christian maturity—and in usefulness to God.

3. Jesus Christ, the only Savior (25)

When we struggle with sin, we soon realize that we are fighting a losing battle. Paul cried out in verse 25, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" The law reminds us how weak and helpless we are. What can we do? Verse 6 says, "But now by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code." This verse opens a window into Chapter 8. Victory in the Christian life only comes when we walk by the Spirit, not by the flesh. So what can we do? We can go to Jesus. When we stop struggling on a human level and go to Jesus we can taste victory. So Paul wrote, "thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ my Lord!" He alone can rescue us from sin and death and enable us to enter into union with him. Because we belong to him we can walk in the new way of the Spirit and bear fruit to God (4,6,25).