

## 031 Set Free To Serve

### *Romans 7:1-6*

Message by R Bruce Montgomery ~ Grace Church ~ 1/24/2016

I don't know about you, but I am really enjoying our study of Romans. Of all the expository series I've preached over the past forty years, I have never personally benefitted as much spiritually as I have from digging into Romans.

The past few weeks we have been uncovering the wonderful truth from Romans six that when we come to faith in Jesus we are set free from sin's bondage.

In **Romans 6:1-14** we learned two great facts. FACT 1 – there is such an intense union between believers and Jesus we are said to have died with him. And FACT 2 – we also, because of that union, at the same time are alive with him!

We can literally be referred to as “the living dead” or “dead men walking.”

We learned a little chorus from Paul's words in **Galatians 2:20** {sing} *I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless, nevertheless I live. Yet not I, yet not I, but Christ who liveth in me. And the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, who loved me, and gave his life for me.*

Then in the last half of **Romans 6** we learned that simultaneously to our being set free from sin's slavery, we became enslaved to God and righteousness.

**Romans 6:19b** *Just as you used to offer the parts of your body to slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness.*

Our Western minds rebel at the very concept of slavery, of being owned by someone else, of having a boss to tell us what to do. Nevertheless, as we saw last week, it is true. We are all slaves of either one or the other – sin or righteousness, Satan or God.

Before our emancipation, we could not refuse sin's authority; but now that we have been liberated we do not have to obey it's orders.

When sin tries to order us around like it used to, need to say, “*you're no longer the boss over me. I don't have to do what you want me to do any longer!*”

Now that we are God's slaves, we seek to please him, to do his bidding. His will becomes our will.

In **Romans 7:1-6** - the verses we will look at today - Paul switches from the analogy of slavery to the analogy of marriage to describe this new found freedom, this new relationship, this new identity of those who have placed their trust in Jesus.

Of all the biblical illustrations of what it means to belong to Jesus, there is none more appealing than that of marriage. It is because love, courtship and marriage are themselves pleasing and because our relationship to Jesus is a relationship of love.

These verses are connected to what he wrote in **Romans 6:14** *For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.*

Then in **6:15** he was quick to explain that being released from the law doesn't imply a license to sin!

“Wait a minute,” you say. “I'm confused. I thought we were talking about being delivered from sin. Now you've switched to talking about being delivered from the law? What possible connection does the law have with sin?” Good question. Let's see if we can discover the answer this morning.

**Romans 7:1** *Do you not know brothers – for I am speaking to men who know the law – that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives?*

Pretty straight forward. The law only has authority you while you're living. When you die, you are removed from its jurisdiction.

Since he's already established that believers have died in Christ, we can guess where he's heading. Whatever authority the law has over others, its power has been abolished for believers. Paul gives an illustration in **verse 2**.

**Romans 7:2** *For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage.*

Paul purposefully chooses a rather rare word for *marriage* here (*hypandros*). It literally means *under a husband*.

In the Romans world a woman held an inferior position to a man. Even according to Jewish law, she was legally bound to a husband more than he was bound to his wife. He could get rid of her simply by handing her divorce papers, but she did not have that same privilege. As long as he was alive, she was bound to that relationship. During that time she was not free to seek another attachment. If her husband died, then she was legally released from her marriage, in Greek: *"the law of the husband."*

As **verse 3** states, she was then legally free to remarry another man without any guilt or shame.

**Romans 7:3** *So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man.*

The point of comparison is that just as the death of the woman's husband freed her from the law so she could marry another; the death of Jesus freed us from to the law so that we now belong to another, namely to the risen Christ.

**Romans 7:4** *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.*

Notice that our death to the law is said to have occurred **through the body of Christ**, referring to the personal physical body of our Savior on the cross. We died with him, both to sin, and to the law.

In this verse we discover why being freed from the law doesn't produce lawlessness but love. We aren't cut free from the law to live as we please, **(chapter six, verse 15)** floating around free from all guidance and help.

No! We were released from the law in order that we might **belong to another!** We are freed from the law precisely to be joined to Jesus.

Never forget that your freedom from the law is because of what Jesus did on the cross. He bore the law's penalty and fulfilled the law's demands for all who believe. The law's condemnation and demand for perfection have been satisfied for

all who belong to him. This is a blood-bought blessing. Rejoice in it for Christ's sake!

**SONG: Now I Belong to Jesus**  
*Jesus, my Lord, will love me forever.  
From him no pow'r of evil can sever.  
He gave His life to ransom my soul;  
Now I belong to Him.*

*Now I belong to Jesus, Jesus belongs to me;  
Not for the years of time alone, but for eternity.*

*Joy floods my soul, for Jesus has saved me,  
Freed me from sin that long had enslaved me;  
His precious blood He gave to redeem,  
Now I belong to Him.*

*Now I belong to Jesus, Jesus belongs to me;  
Not for the years of time alone, but for eternity.*

The purpose of our dying to the law was not only to sever its control over us and pave the way for a new relationship with Jesus. It certainly does those things, but it doesn't stop there. The purpose of our death to the law is that we **might bear fruit to God.**

**Romans 7:4** *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.*

Just as the fruit of a marriage is children, so the believer's union with Christ results in spiritual fruit. As Jesus taught in his teaching on the vine and the branches in **John 15**, the secret of our bearing fruit is union with him. We literally can do nothing to produce the fruit of righteousness apart from him.

**Romans 7:5** *For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death.*

Legalists and moralists labor under the great delusion that the law produces good works! The law brings wrath (4:25), it increases trespass (5:20) and makes us conscious of sin (3:20)

but it is never said to produce good works. Actually the opposite is true.

God gave the law to accomplish two objectives: (1) the law clarifies and exposes what is sin (**Romans 5:12,13**).

(2) The law exposes our sinful, rebellious nature. As Paul writes here, the law *arouses* our *sinful passions* whose fruit is death!

By themselves our impulses and emotions are neutral – they can be either bad or good. Here Paul points out that when the law is allowed to work on them it excites them not to good, but to bad behavior!

The cause of all the evil actions in our world doesn't lie in the absence of good laws, but in the sinful nature of unregenerate people.

When the law tells us we shouldn't do something, our sinful natures rebel and we do that which we are told we shouldn't.

If you tell a child not to do something, what's the first thing he or she is going to do when your back is turned?

A couple of years ago my daughter set some Dove Chocolates out in a dish. She told our grandson Eddie he could have one, but then to stay out of them. Somehow they all disappeared.

When confronted by his mother, empty wrapper evidence in hand, Eddie stood there a minute, then decided to appeal to a higher power. *But Mom, God wanted me to have them!*

When I was four, living in Jordan, I was repeatedly warned about not putting anything into an empty light socket. Well, curiosity got the best of me. I tried putting a pencil into the socket. Nothing happened! So I stuck my thumb in and received my first ever painful electrical shock!

Morality can be taught by example and a discussion of worthy values. It is helpful to discuss honesty, generosity, fair play and so on.

But current efforts to teach morality in the public schools often does more harm than good.

Trying to teach morality by introducing young people to behavior they haven't yet heard about or at least know very little

about - deviant sexual practices, for instance, or the use of drugs – doesn't prepare them to resist the sin, but only instills in them a desire to commit the sin in question.

As D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones warns: . . . *the 'motions of sin' are actually inflamed even by the Law of God. The very law that prohibits them encourages us to do them, because we are impure.*

*By teaching children about sex, and by warning them against the consequences of certain actions, what you are really doing is to introduce them to the whole subject. Naturally they will greatly enjoy it, their curiosity will be aroused, and they will desire to read further.<sup>1</sup>*

It's not just children, of course. Chuck Swindoll gives a great illustration.<sup>2</sup>

*Years ago, one of the first high-rise hotels in Galveston, Texas, sat directly above the Gulf; it was so close to the water, in fact, that the owners worried that people would want to drop their fishing lures into the water from the guest room balconies. The high winds, the large lead sinkers, and the first story glass windows were certain to be a bad combination. Thus, the management placed a sign in each room facing the ocean: ABSOLUTELY NO FISHING FROM THE BALCONY.*

*What happened? You guessed it. Guests in the first story restaurant dined to the frequent smack of lead weights against the plate glass windows. Sometimes the glass literally cracked. Finally, the people managing the hotel realized their error and made a wise decision: they removed all the signs in the guest rooms.*

*Problem solved! No one ever fished from their balconies again.*

**Romans 7:6** *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.*

The purpose of our release from the law is a radically new, superior way of serving God. The Jews thought that by

---

<sup>1</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapters 7:1-8:4, The Law: Its Functions and Limits*, pp. 80,81.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Swindoll, *New Testament Insights on Romans*, p. 150.

keeping the minutiae of the law they would please God and attain righteousness. They discovered that although the law was good, in a paradoxical manner it was also an overwhelming back-breaking burden for those who took it seriously.

The Jews had a word for it. They called it a *yoke*, like what was put around the necks of animals to harness them for hard labor. The godly Jew was proud of his yoke. It was from God, it set him apart from the godless Gentiles. But it was still a yoke, a great and overwhelming burden.

Peter spoke about this at the Council of Jerusalem (**Acts 15**). There were people at the council who wanted to impose the Old Testament law on Gentile converts to Christ. Paul and Peter argued that this was the wrong thing to do. As Peter said, **Acts 15:10** *“Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear?”*

Here in **Romans 7** Paul is concerned for righteousness. How can we attain it as long as we are “married” to law? The old husband is impotent. It never engendered righteousness in anyone. So how can we be fruitful? The answer, as we have seen, is this: death must terminate the old unfruitful marriage in order that we might enter into a new, everlasting fruitful relationship with Jesus Christ.

Now our relationship to the law has changed. In our old relationship in bondage to the law we could only bear the fruit leading to death (**verse 5**). Sin and guilt ruled our lives because, while the law could tell us what sort of fruit we should bear, it was powerless to help us produce it.

Now we have a new nature that is not fighting against the law. Instead of trying to live in harmony with the law by studying it and following every letter (which we are powerless to do anyway), we allow the Spirit of God to live through us, and the Spirit of God is never in rebellion against or inclined to disobey God’s moral code. Under the control of the Spirit we can bear such fruit as he lists in

**Galatians 5:22,23** *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*

God told Adam and Eve in the garden, *“Be fruitful, and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it”* **Genesis 1:28a**. He tells us the same thing – to be fruitful and increase – not in physical offspring, of course, but with the righteousness grounded in our union with Jesus and produced by the Holy Spirit.

One of the most difficult struggles many older people have is a sense of uselessness. Their children are grown, and don’t seem to need them anymore. They are retired, and no longer have satisfaction in their work. Let me encourage you with this: Spirit-filled fruit-bearing service is not only a privilege; it is something we never outlive.

**Psalm 92:14,15** *[The righteous] will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, “The LORD is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him.”*

One day the God of the universe is going to throw the most magnificent banquet party ever held! The guests will be in the millions, maybe even billions. The angelic legions will be there to serve these honored guests. Jesus, the Bridegroom, will be seated at the Father’s right hand.

And if you are a believer, you will be there too! You see, you and I, we are the bride! This is a wedding feast, the great marriage supper of the Lamb.

Nothing on earth or in heaven will keep you from being there at that great celebration – if you are united with Jesus. We would do well to picture that great day. If you know where you’re headed, you should be preparing for that day with every spiritual thought and every deed you do, bearing fruit for God so that on that day you will be able to lift it up and offer it to him with holy hands and with unspeakable joy.

**MY PRAYER:** May God grip us with the realization of who we are – dead to sin, free from the law, united with Jesus.

**CLOSING SONG:** *I will serve thee.*