

The Law and Sanctification

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Romans 7:1-6

Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? 2 For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. 3 So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man. 4 Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. 5 For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. 6 But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.

In the message two weeks ago, I shared the role of our physical, material bodies in our sin and our sanctification. These physical bodies we inhabit are as much involved in our sins and in our righteousness as are the mind and the heart. I think one of the reasons we fail to grow any further in grace is because we've not realized the role of the body.

In Romans 6, Paul makes it clear that it's not just a matter of the mind thinking correctly and the heart or the spirit being in submission to the Father, but the body has a role to play in our sanctification.

The reason for the body having a role in sanctification is because you're a whole person. You're not divided into three parts—body, soul, and spirit—those three parts work as one cohesive unit. Therefore, when you sin, your body sins with you. When you do righteous, your body does righteously. This is the way it worked from the very moment of your birth, because God made you to be a material being in a material world. The old person you were, “the old man,” as Paul refers to him in Romans 6:6, is no longer who you are now. The “old man” life you lived before Christ, is no longer your identity, you're a new creation. Paul in Ephesians and Colossians calls the believer a new man. He's making the distinction between before Christ (B.C.) and after Christ (A.C.). After Christ has come into your life, you're a new person. You are not the old person enslaved and dominated by sin, as you once were.

But the problem is the way the body works. The body is just a machine and it has to be programmed. It's programmed to operate in the earliest moments of life until you are a Christian. It's

programmed by the old person you once were. The sinful nature educated your body to respond to life and circumstances. It was by the old man and sin's desires and the principles thereof, you were trained how to react to life and the stimulus of your environment. But now that you're a Christian, you have a new spirit in you; however, the body hasn't been retrained yet.

For example, my favorite sport is baseball. Baseball, to me, is one of the most incredible sports there is for numerous reasons. For one, I think it's one of the most difficult things in all athletics to hit a little round, horsehide leather sphere, with a stick called a bat. When you realize that the distance from the pitcher to the batter is 60' 6" and the ball is coming at you at speeds faster than 90 miles per hour, it's an incredible feat to be able to make contact with the ball. The average pitcher in the Major Leagues can throw 95-100 miles per hour, some even up to 101-102.

That means once the ball is released from the pitcher's hand and makes it to the plate, where the batter is standing, four-tenths of a second has elapsed. Not a half a second but less! Four-tenths of a second. By the time the batter sees the ball released and makes the decision either to swing or not, the ball has already traveled 30'. That means he has less than two hundred and fifty-thousandths of a second to start the swing. You talk about something remarkable.

And, when the batter swings, if he makes contact with the ball—and that's a big if—he has hundreds of a thousandth of a second to make sure that bat hits the ball precisely because if he does make contact precisely it will be a foul ball.

We are talking about a required precision that is faster than the brain can think.

So, what does a baseball player do if he wants to be proficient? He has to train the body to react. He has about 30' and two hundred and fifty-thousandths of a second to decide if he's going to swing or not swing. From that moment on, hand and eye coordination and muscle memory take over. You know what muscle memory is? It's to do the same thing over and over so the muscles, under pressure, without thinking, can execute the action.

Between Shelby's, my eldest son's, junior and senior year of high school, I worked with him and Joseph every day. I made him and Joseph swing at a ball, usually on a tee, or in front of a mirror, no less than 150 times a day. He had to do that all summer long. Why? Because I was trying to help him develop muscle memory. He was a high .200s percentage hitter. For those of you who know little about baseball, let me help you. In baseball, if you get up to the plate 10 times and hit the ball three times, you're a great baseball player. That means you're going to fail seven times, but in baseball that's not failure, not if you can hit it three times out of 10. That's a .300-percentage.

By the time Shelby finished his senior year, he was hitting .441 and I attribute that to muscle memory. When I had him start, I had him go in slow motion. That aggravated him. He wanted to take a big ol' swing, but he needed to go slow in order to establish that muscle memory. If you only have two hundred and fifty-thousandths of a second in which to make a decision you're going to swing, it's all muscle memory. The body takes over and it's all reactionary.

Beloved, this is not only true about physical actions in playing sports, it's also true about holiness. The body is trained by the sinful nature. It's trained to respond to certain things the same way. So, if someone says something derogatorily to you, you might act timidly at first, but the next time you might be a little bolder, and the next time a little more bold, and then the next time a little more bold, and then you're the one talking derogatorily to everyone else. It becomes a habit, a way of life. The tongue has been trained. What do we often say about our speech? That we speak *without thinking*. That's true for the most part. The body, the tongue, is just reacting to the stimuli the way it always does. That doesn't excuse you or me. Because the tongue is a part of us and therefore it is us that is acting.

How do you make righteousness reign in the body after you have been saved? The answer is breaking the cycle of the old man. You've got to stop. You can't start new habits until you've broken the old habits. We've got to break the cycle. Even though the old man is dead and gone, the body that has been trained by that old man is very much alive and working.

Let's go back and look at what Paul says in Romans 6. He states this simply and it seems easier than it really is, but Paul is establishing a principle here.

*“Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?”
(Romans 6:16)*

Do you see his point? What you do with your body is very important. If you yield your body, whether it be your tongue, your fist, your eyes, your ears, your feet, your sexual organs, and volunteer them to serve sin, what's going to happen? The next time it's going to be easier. Paul will say this in verse 19. But the same is also true when it comes to obedience to God, I have to present my eyes, ears, tongue, hands, sexual organs, my feet, to the Lord. If I offer this to the Lord, this will lead to righteousness.

“But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. 18 And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.” (Romans 6:17-18)

Paul is talking about what's real. That's the truth about you. It may not be your practice yet, but it is true. You're a slave of Jesus Christ, you're no longer a slave to sin. So, when you commit a sin, you're not presenting just your heart, you're also presenting your body and developing the habit of sin to become entrenched in the body, and that brings the body back under sin's control. That's what a habit is.

Paul is saying to do the opposite because the opposite is true. Look at verse 19.

“I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh...”

Paul uses the word *flesh* in many different ways. Sometimes it means the body, sometimes it means the appetites and passions of the mind and body, sometimes it means humanity, so we have to ask how he's using it here. I believe he's using it directed toward Christians and it means, natural, human abilities. He's saying, "I'm talking to you like this because I know our natural abilities are weak." It's the same thing Jesus said to the sleeping disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, "The spirit is willing but the flesh—the body, your natural abilities—is weak."

"For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness,"

That's a crucial statement. We talked about it two weeks ago. What's he saying? He's saying the same thing we say about an alcoholic. You've heard the old proverb, "A man takes a drink, the drink takes a drink, the drink takes the man." Paul is saying if you offer your body to sin's temptation, sin has the ability to get a stronghold and the next time you're tempted with that same thing it's going to be easier and easier to give in and it's going to lead to more uncleanness. The habit of sin has been entrenched in the body.

But don't despair, Paul says now that we've been freed from the law's demands, we don't have to do what the flesh tells us.

"so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness."

The more righteousness you do, the more holy you become, and it becomes a way of life. But how do you do that? How do you break that cycle of the old man? That's what we want to talk about in our text. Paul does the same thing I often do, in fact, I really learned a lot of this from Paul. He first tells you what you don't do. Look at Romans 7:1. He tells you that you don't break the cycle of the old man by running to the law. You don't run to the law to try and retrain your body in sanctification.

I. You Do Not Break the Cycle of the Old Man By Running to the Law.

When you realize you've done something wrong, what's the natural tendency of everyone of us? Once I realize I'm wrong, after confessing and repenting to the Lord, what is usually my first resolve? To try harder and do better the next time. Isn't that typically our resolve? It should be. You should do better because repentance includes the idea of change. The question is how do you do it better the next time?

The Apostle Paul knows that the knowledge of being freed from the dominion and power of sin is not enough. He knows that a Christian has been set free from the power of sin. This person was once enslaved to their sins but they heard the Gospel, they believed in Christ and repented of their sins, and God supernaturally broke the power of sin. The hymn writer said, "He breaks the power of cancelled sin." I love that, don't you? I love *And Can It Be* when it says the dungeon,

flamed with light, the response was “My chains fell off, my heart was free; I rose, went forth and followed Thee.”

What’s the first reaction of a person just saved? “I want to serve Jesus.” That’s the motivation and stimulus within. “I want to serve Him, I want to please Him, I want to do what’s right.” But what do we do? Every new Christian immediately goes to the law, the commandments of God, to find out what God thinks about him or her and their life. You run to the law to find out what God thinks. Very good. But you had better be wise because once reviewing what God says, most Christians say, “Okay, now I know what to do and what God expects of me. This is what I’ll do.” And that just doesn’t work. That’s why Paul wrote the seventh chapter of Romans.

A lot of people think, *Why is this chapter in the Bible, especially right here?* Some think it should go between chapters five and six, some don’t even understand the seventh chapter at all and they get into a debate about whether it’s Paul before his conversion or after his conversion. But the whole purpose of chapter seven is because Paul, anointed by the Holy Spirit, is wise Himself about human nature. He realized that after telling people they’re free from the power of sin the first thing they’re going to do is run out and try in their own power, in the power of natural abilities, to obey God. So, he says the Law is not where you should run because it doesn’t break the cycle of the old man, it only reinforces it.

A. The Law Demands Allegiance to the First Husband—the Old Man.

Who is the first husband? Most of us would say the law. We’re married to the law. But that’s not reading closely and carefully. Let’s read verse one and two.

“Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law),”

Who is he talking to? He’s writing to a Roman church so you would think it’s basically a Gentile congregation, but at this time it’s more likely that the predominant group was Jewish. There was a tension within the church in Rome. There was some strife and a little dissension between the Jews and the Gentiles because the Jews would say, “Well, we know you are our brothers and sisters but you don’t have the Torah, you don’t have the law. God gave that to us so we’re a little closer to God than you.” Thus, there was tension.

Friends, we should not be surprised when the body of Christ suffers tension, strife, and disagreement. Why does Paul write to the Ephesians, “Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”? Because he knows that just because you’re a Christian doesn’t mean you can’t be contrary now and then or have differences of opinion. Here we have a church who was having some tension and he speaks to the segment that thought they were better and he said, “I’m writing to you Jews who know the law of God,” and he gives them an illustration that really smacks them in the face.

“that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? 2 For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives.”

As long as the law of God is intact and the husband is alive, that woman, by the law, is bound to stay married to her husband. The law is not who she is married to; the law binds her to her husband. Who, then, is the husband? The old man. Who you used to be. The law said, “This is who you are married to. This is your first and only husband and you’ve got to stay married to him. As long as that old man is alive, you’re bound to him.” In other words, Adam, the adamic nature.

B. There is No Way We Can Marry the Second Husband—Jesus Christ.

This is a perfect illustration. Here’s a woman who is married to a toad. You know, a jerk. He is less than a gentleman. And then here’s Jesus Christ, the consummate gentleman.

Here’s the old man: he’s dominated by sin and he’s ugly. He abuses the wife. Sin abuses us. We think we’re doing what we want to do, but stop and watch people who live their lives for themselves and tell me who really profited. Sin is a cruel taskmaster. People don’t want to come to Jesus because they think He’s hard. He’s not hard compared to sin. Sin always promises you more than it can deliver. Do you hear me? It always promises more than it can deliver. Jesus always delivers what He promises—life more abundantly.

So, you’re married to this guy who is ugly, has mistreated you, is unkind, does and says terrible things, and then you look over at Jesus and He is the perfect gentleman.

This guy is cruel but this One is compassionate.

Where this one is hateful, this One is loving.

Where this one gives nothing, and takes everything, this One gives all and asks for nothing.

Who do you want to be married to?

Here is an unbeliever and God opens their eyes to see their true situation and Jesus Christ, the perfect Husband, and the law says, “You can’t come over here and have this Man while you’re married to that one.”

*“So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress . . .”
(Romans 7:3a)*

I don’t care who it is, even Jesus, she cannot marry someone else without violating the law. What’s the solution?

II. The Breaking of the Cycle of the Old Man is to Die to the Old Man and the Law

The solution is to die not only to the old man but to die to the law.

A. The Only Way We Can Be Married to Christ is By Death and Resurrection.

“... but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man. 4 Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God.” (Romans 3:3b-4)

I know this sounds complicated and it's conceptual but it's easy to understand once we define these terms. Paul is saying you were married to the old man, but you died through the body of Christ.

Let's go back to Romans six. The Bible says when Jesus died, you died also. Jesus died to sin (Romans 6:10), meaning, He was born in the environment of sin and He was tempted with it. Worse than that, He took your sin and suffered its penalty so that when He died to sin He not only died to its penalty but He died to its power, so that when He was raised from the dead He's not under the dominion of sin anymore.

He's living a resurrected life, a new life, no longer under the subjection of sin. Not only did He die to sin, but now in chapter seven, Paul says that Jesus also died to the law. The strength of sin is the law, says Paul in I Corinthians 15. The strength of sin is the law. If there is no law, there is no transgression, no sin. Jesus didn't just die to the penalty of sin, He died to bondage and duty to the law.

When Jesus came out of the grave, He was no longer under the Law's dominion and needed no longer to submit Himself to it. He had already completed it, fulfilled it, finished it. He was living under a new principle, a principle He had not lived for 33 years—freedom from the law. He no longer had to be in its service. He now lives to God directly, apart from the Law. He obeyed the Law, He had relationship with the Father through the Law, He was the only one who could have relationship with the Father because He was the only one who perfectly obeyed the Law. But, with His death to the Law, there is no more getting to God through the Law.

The apostle's argument continues—you, too, died to the Law through the dead body of Christ so that you can be married to Him. When Jesus and you were raised from the dead, you were raised new. You're not the old person you used to be. Hallelujah! I'm not Michael Durham the old man anymore! I'm still a stinker at times but I'm not him. Glory! I've been set free! I'm not under the power of sin. I'm not under the power of the Law. That means I don't have to get to God through obedience to the Law. Hallelujah!

What happens now? How do I break this old cycle of this body who has been trained by the Law and sin? Verse six is our answer.

“But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.” (Romans 7:6)

Paul says, “You Jews in Rome, listen to me. If you think your service to God is better than the Gentiles because you have the Law and you’re keeping it, I want to tell you that you’re on very dangerous ground. We’ve been set free from the Law so we can serve God through the power of the Spirit of Christ who lives within us, and not by trying to keep our bodies in outward conformity to the Law.”

The way to God is not through obedience to the Law it’s through Jesus Christ by the Spirit in us. When he talks about being dead to the letter of the Law, he’s talking about doing your best and trying harder to keep the commandments of God. What did we say the Christian wants to do once he or she is saved? We want to obey God. The desire of God is working in us to both will and to do His good pleasure. Therefore, we run to the commandments of God to see what He expects and we ought to keep them. “If you love Me, keep My commandments.” But Jesus didn’t mean to just take your natural ability, that is your flesh, and honor Him with it by doing the best you can. We can’t do that because the letter of the Law kills (2 Corinthians 3).

The Law was never designed or given to us to be the means to God. Do you know what the purpose of the Law is? It’s to show you how much of a stinker you are along with me. It’s to show us the exceeding sinfulness of sin. God never meant for you to get to Him by the Law. The Law was added, says Paul in the fifth chapter, 2500 years after Adam. There were no 10 commandments before Moses but Paul said in the fifth chapter of Romans that people sinned, maybe not in the same way Adam did, not in the semblance or likeness of Adam but they have been sinning all of those years. How is that possible if there was no law? Because their nature and actions contradicted who God is, and this is the essence of sin. Therefore, the Law was added in order to expose this depravity.

When we move into the seventh chapter and people get into the arguments about whether this is Paul before or after conversion, they miss the reason for the chapter. The whole purpose of Romans 7 is to show you that you can be neither justified or sanctified by the Law. That means you cannot be saved by the Law and you cannot be made holy and gain God’s blessings by the Law. The Law is only going to show you how terrible you and I are, how weak our flesh is in keeping the commandments. What we need is grace.

Grace is God’s undeserved activity doing in you, through you, and by you what you cannot do yourself. It’s God in you doing what you cannot do in your natural abilities. Law is my activity doing something for God, trying to keep His commandments. All the Law will do is stir up the flesh. Look at verse five.

“For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death.” (Romans 7:5)

Most likely you’ve got two kinds of kids, if you have two or more. There are only two kinds of children. You’re going to have one that when you tell them not to do something it’s an invitation to do it. You’re going to have another child that when you tell them not to do something they will now work their dead-level best to keep your commandment in order to gain your favor and approval. That’s the only kinds of kids there are and neither one of those children are obeying. Neither one of them.

I had one of each. I could tell one, “Don’t do that,” and I knew he would try to find a way to do it and then keep it from me. I would always say, “Son, be sure your sin will find you out.” And invariably dad always found out. I was praying, “God, keep me informed, make sure I know. I don’t want my son to get by with anything because then he’ll think he can get by with You.” Then I had another son and I would tell him what to do, he would work to obey and his pride would rise in self-righteousness thinking he’d done something. Neither one obeyed the Lord.

Natural ability cannot please God. They that are in the flesh cannot please God. That’s why the Bible goes to such great lengths talking about this. For example, Jesus said this to Nicodemus. He told the religious man that the flesh cannot enter the kingdom of God. Paul said the same thing when he wrote, “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 15:50). Natural ability, wisdom of the mind, natural strength, is not sufficient to gain us perfection with God.

Not only does the Law stir up the flesh in the old man, but also does so in the new man.

*“But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, **so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit** and not in the oldness of the letter.” (Romans 7:6)*

Some of your translations don’t say “should serve” it says “serve” or “we do serve,” and puts it in the present tense. The authorized translation and a couple others, like the New King James, put the *should* in because of interpretation, it’s not in the original. But, I believe the interpretation is correct. It is correct that you *should* because Paul is not assuming that you’re going to. That’s why he says,

“Do not let sin reign in your mortal body.” (Romans 6:12)

“I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.” (Romans 6:19)

He’s talking to Christians and he’s not assuming they are always going to do what they should do in the power of the Spirit. Yes, you *should*. The question is, how should I?

I'm going to end with this. I want to pray you get this and it speaks to you.

Here I am, a saved person but I'm trying to run to the Law to break the cycle of sin that trained my body to act wrongly. How do I know if I am doing this? If you're sitting here thinking, "That's not me. I don't do this," let me give you four indications that it could be you. We'll end with this. These are the signs of living by the flesh to keep the Law to stop the cycle of the old man in the body.

Four Indicators of Living by the Law Not the Spirit:

1. Pride in your righteousness.

This is like one of my sons. They boast in their successes so they do not have to look at their failures and to keep you from looking at their failures. The person who talks about their spiritual successes excessively is a person trying to keep the law but they don't want to be frustrated with their failures because they can't keep the law. What do they do? They focus on what they did do right, at least in their minds. They rehearse it to themselves and to others. But it's a diversion tactic, not just for others, to keep them from seeing their short-comings, but mainly for their own selves. They're trying to divert their attention from their own failures and that's why they're always boasting. Braggadocios people are some of the most insecure people. It's a means of not having to look at where the problem areas are. That's trying to keep the law. The law is pointing at those problem areas and they don't want to see it.

2. Critical of others.

When you get into conversation with people it's not very long before you're talking about other people. You automatically begin to talk about and expose the weaknesses of other people. It's automatic. You probably don't even realize it's a problem. The tongue has been trained to get into that routine. It's a normal/abnormal life. The reason they're critical of others is the same reason the guy who is proud of his self-righteousness. It's another diversion tactic. If I focus on the problems of others you can't see mine. Did you know that usually we're critical of people in the very areas we struggle in? I've found that true about me. You know why I can see it in others? Because I have the same problem. This means I'm trying to keep the law but I'm failing at it and I don't want to admit it.

3. Failure to admit failure.

I don't want to claim responsibility or own what I did because if I own what I did then I have to come face to face with the reality that I'm breaking God's law.

4. Condemnation leading to depression.

There are a lot of Christians who are miserable but they wouldn't know it's depression but it is; it's a form of it. Martin Lloyd-Jones called it "spiritual depression." It's a form of depression nonetheless. You know you're not obeying God, but you try, just like the Romans 7 found later in the chapter. "For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice." Finally, you're so despairing that you say, "Who can free me from this body of sin" (notice the word, body), you want to be free. When someone says something and I retaliate, I walk away knowing I blew it again. I've prayed and asked God a hundred times to deliver me from this evil tongue but nothing happens and now I'm depressed, discouraged, and frustrated. "I don't even know if I'm a Christian. If I am, this is just the way I am. I guess God doesn't love me as much as He loves someone else." That's an indication that you're trying to live by the law not by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Next week we'll bring you the solution, but I want to encourage you this morning that there is a solution.

The solution is as simple as acknowledging your inability to keep the commandments of God. In fact, if I could ask anything from you today it's this, that you would say to the Lord, "Please help me to understand that I'm not married or bound to the Law anymore. I don't get to You through the Law, that is, my rule-keeping."

How many of you broke commandments this week? Aren't you glad to know that those commandments that condemn your actions do not bar the way to God this morning? Aren't you happy that you can still go into the presence of God as if you hadn't sinned this week and broke those commandments?

I'm asking the Holy Spirit to really burn this into your heart and mind this week so that when we come back next week we're ready for the solution because some of us are not ready right now. I could tell you the solution and you would leave under more bondage because you have not yet broken the spell of the lie that says the only way to God is through your performance.

For 23 years, I've preached to you the grace of God that says there is no other way but through Christ and you've yet to learn, but God can do it this morning. It's hard sometimes to break these cycles of the old man and his training but God is able. Amen.