

Dead to the law

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[0 : 0 0] Romans 7 at verse 4 Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ, that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.

We have been looking at the Ten Commandments, as you know, and we have taken it upon us to study the first four of these commandments, which concern the worship of God.

The Ten Commandments, we have noticed, are divisible into two tables. The first table concerns man's duty to love God, and the second table is man's duty to love his neighbor as himself.

We have further noticed that in the Ten Commandments, there is a certain logical progression and order. The first commandment deals with the object of worship, which is to be the triune God.

And the second commandment deals with the form of our worship, that it is to be according to divine ordinance, and not according to man's invention. We notice also that the third commandment deals with the spirit of worship, that we are to love God and to serve God in a manner which does not take his name in vain.

[1 : 2 1] And then we notice in the fourth of the commandment, we are told particularly about the time for serving God, which is one day in seven, which is a holy Sabbath or Lord's Day, to the end of the world.

Now I want to pause in our progressive study of the commandment, because there is a danger that we might miss the wood for the trees, and that we might find ourselves losing the spirit of what we are seeking to do.

And I propose today to look at a related subject of the commandment, and that is to investigate the question, why should the commandment still be a rule of faith, even after we have come to trust in Christ?

Because the questions may cross our minds, we may say to ourselves, what does it mean that we have come to faith in Christ?

Does it not mean that we have left the commandments behind? How then now should we be studying the commandments all over again, and beginning to have a sense of guiltiness that we are not able to keep them perfectly?

[2 : 3 3] Surely the requirement of the New Testament age is faith, rather than obedience to a code of law. So that's one sort of question that we might be asking.

Another question is this, it is, in what sense is the believer dead to the law? Because if we are dead to the law, should we not be leaving the law in the grave?

Why should we be resurrecting the law, if we are dead to the law? It is questions like that which have perplexed the best Christian minds for many centuries.

It is to get the balance right between these questions and the answers to them that we must labor, continually seeking God's guidance and his help and his understanding.

Now you will notice in chapter 7 of verse 4, that Paul deals exactly with this last question that I have raised, when he says, Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ, and so on.

[3 : 45] So I think that we could say that chapter 7 of Romans, verses 1 to 6, is the best possible place to turn to to get an answer to the question, In what sense is the believer dead to the law?

Because that is precisely the question that the apostle Paul is squarely facing. So let us look at verses 1 to 6, which contain an illustration drawn from marriage, divorce, and remarriage.

Indeed you could say that the illustration here, concerning the believer's relationship to the law, is exactly in those words. It is a sort of threefold illustration.

First of all, he speaks about a woman who is married as being under the authority of a husband and has been bound to her husband, so that she is not free to marry anybody else as long as the husband is alive.

And then he turns to the possibility that the husband should die, and the woman then become free to remarry if she so desires. If a woman married to a husband, says Paul, remarries whilst the husband is alive, then she is classed as an adulterous woman.

[5 : 01] But if the husband is dead, and she remarries, she is not any longer regarded as an adulterous woman because she is free to remarry. And then he looks at a related question, and that is, that when we have been married a second time like that, we have a new relationship with a second husband.

So what does he refer to in spiritual and gospel terms? Well, the illustration here is of the law and of Christ.

You say to me, what do I mean? Well, Paul's meaning is this. Every unconverted man and woman is automatically married to the law at the date and time of his birth.

But every person who becomes converted to Christ becomes divorced from the law at the moment of his conversion or new birth.

And then the third thing he teaches here is that every person who is divorced from the law becomes automatically and immediately married to a second husband.

[6 : 20] That is to say, to Christ. So you could say the summary of the illustration is in these words. The unconverted person has one husband.

The converted person has a different husband. All mankind, according to this illustration, is married to one husband or another.

If they're unconverted and graceless men and women, then their husband is the Ten Commandments. They are married to the law. However, if they're converted persons, they have a different husband.

They are married to Christ. They used to be married to the law before their conversion. But when they were born of the Spirit of God, there was a death took place and a remarriage took place.

They became divorced from the law and they were married to Christ. Now I think we can all see therefore the essence of what that illustration teaches. It's a very striking illustration.

[7 : 26] I grant you that it is not something that you perhaps would have used as an illustration yourself, but here we have an inspired man. Here we have an apostle who has the Spirit of God and he uses this for gripping, surely arresting and striking and startling illustration.

And he does so simply because he knows how hard it is for your mind and my mind to grasp these spiritual truths. And so he puts it into a concrete illustrative case that we might grasp it more easily.

Now there is one other strand here in this illustration which I have not yet mentioned but to just touch on. And that is the possibility of children. Because Paul goes on to develop this illustration at the end and he says by the first marriage to the law there was no issue.

There were no children. We brought forth no children or fruit to God. But he says by the second marriage we do bring forth fruit, children if you like, to the glory of God.

So to develop the illustration what he says is this Our first union and marriage was with the Ten Commandments and it produced no spiritual children.

[8 : 44] But when we were divorced at our conversion and remarried to Christ as our second husband the union was a fruitful one. The law could not make us fruitful.

It had no potentiality. It could not as some writer has said could not impregnate us with this fruitfulness towards good works. But as soon as we are married to Christ as the living Lord immediately men and women become fruitful to the glory of God.

They bring forth as it were spiritual children to the glory of God. Now that then is the illustration broken down and analyzed and in essence explained.

and I want now to open it up for the time we have this morning. And I want first of all our attention to see this every man who is not a Christian is married to the law of God.

And he is married to it as the source of his spiritual life. So that Paul is teaching if we ourselves are not converted persons we are under the severity of a husband who demands of us absolute perfection.

[10 : 15] salvation. He makes tremendous demands of the unconverted person. He demands things which are beyond our power to do.

Now listen those of you who are not Christians here today listen and realize what God requires of you to do if you are to have the blessing of the covenant of grace the covenant of life the covenant of salvation.

if you are to have heaven and forgiveness and peace with God then if you are an unconverted person and you want to get it through the law then you must be absolutely perfect.

You must not sin in thought word or deed. You must keep all the ten commandments in every respect complete total ideally you must reach the absolute perfect height of God's requirement of you.

Thou shalt have no other gods before me thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy honour thy father and thy mother thou shalt not kill commit adultery steal bear false witness or covet not now if you want to get to heaven unconverted friend by your own goodness and keeping of the law I hope you're with me I hope you're listening carefully then you must keep the law 100% if you want to get to heaven through goodness of your own through virtue of your own then you must reach the mark 100% obedience to the husband you are under that husband the law and if you want to get to heaven through keeping the law then the standard is one of absolute perfection and I point out to you that the law gives you no help he gives you no strength he doesn't give you any grace he doesn't infuse any power into you the ten commandments simply command you what you should do without giving you so much as a finger of help in how to do it now that is the illustration of the husband as the law as the covenant of life and I hope you can all see from that that there is no way you could ever get to heaven or find peace with

[12 : 55] God through that husband you cannot because you know very well that you do not keep those requirements you have never kept one of them perfectly you no man living could say to me I have never had an impure thought I have never said a rash word I have never desired anything which was unholy I have never broken the sabbath day once you cannot say that I cannot say that but those who hope to get to heaven by the law are in effect trying to do the impossible and don't you pitter them and don't you pitter the preachers on the BBC that tell people these little moral stories about being good and loving your neighbor and all of this are not and rubbish because that's what it is of course we must love our neighbor and be good but you can't get heaven by doing that because we are cursed under the curse of

God the law demands perfection the husband is severe and demands of us absolute righteousness if you want to get to heaven that way and it is a monstrous stupidity for anyone to think they can get heaven by being good or being kind or being religious you can't do it the husband demands the impossible now then you say why should God require of me the impossible the answer is very simple two answers first because God made us originally in the history of the world he made us able to be perfect as God made Adam and Eve they were able to keep the law had they not sinned you and I would have been able to keep that law but because they broke it we have all fallen we are all ruined by the fall of Adam we cannot keep the law the husband was given to us originally in order that we might be able to get to heaven by law keeping but once we became sinners we fell into the gutter and there's no way we can get to heaven by that husband now we might hold him by the arm and hope that he will carry us to heaven but he will reject us and cast us off because of our sins we shall not get there and every unconverted sinner who is not a believer in Christ they are bound by that law whether they want to be or not they are absolutely under the authority of that law and the language of the commandment is this work work work your way work

I demand of you continually to work and labour and be perfect and the answer that every right thinking person has to give when they hear the demand of the law is God be merciful to me a sinner I cannot do it but let's put that to ourselves then those of us here today who have never seen this point before do you realise it is impossible to get heaven or salvation by this husband of the law to use Paul's illustration but if you don't see that point you have not understood the ABC of the gospel's teaching so I come now secondly to look at this point which Paul brings to us when we become converted to faith in Christ we are immediately free from that marriage bond to the law let's see how he puts it then verse 3 so then if while her husband liver she be married to another man she shall be called an adulteress but if her husband be dead she is free from that law so that she is no adulteress thou shall be married to another man and then he goes on to say this wherefore my brethren ye also are become dead to the law by the body of

Christ now clearly there's some explaining there needs to be done for us when we become believers in the Christ who died upon the cross we become dead with Christ now this is a wonderful truth which goes far deeper than most men have ever concentrated on but we are going to concentrate on this and we're going to grasp this today when the Lord Jesus died on the cross 2000 years ago he died not for himself but he died for his people that would believe in him he died in the room instead of his people so in the sight of God when he died for us we died in him isn't that logical if he died in our place 2000 years ago then it's as good as saying

I died when he died seeing he was my substitute and did it on my behalf and in my room and that's exactly how God accounts of the matter when the sinner believes in Jesus death takes place death to the law because when Christ died he died for me when I believe in him what he did becomes true of me and I therefore become dead to the law and a divorce takes place and that's the happiest divorce this world will ever know about most divorces are not happy things but that's a happy divorce and I would that everyone in the world was divorced in that sense because that is the blessing that comes upon you those who are married to the law are under a curse because it is said cursed is everyone that continues not in all things written in the book of the law to do them but as soon as we believe in Christ we are divorced from the ten commandments it can no longer curse us it can no longer condemn us it can no longer make that severe demand upon us as soon as we are divorced from the law then we become married to another to the

[19 : 38] Lord Jesus Christ now I know these things require us to concentrate so let me use an illustration which might possibly help two illustrations which might possibly help the first illustration is this supposing now the channel tunnel has been built and we are travelling under the channel tunnel now as you were driving in the motor car to the terminal to get onto the train that takes you under the channel tunnel you were driving on the left hand side of the road because the law of Great Britain tells you that as you drive you must always drive on the left and then you get to your terminal you drive onto this big train I presume this is what will happen I'm just imagining and then the train takes all these cars under the tunnel so many miles and then you get out in France and then eventually when everything is ready you drive off this truck or wagon now there's a new law operates here what will be tied to one who drives on the left hand side of the road now you now drive on the right hand side of the road why well because it's a new country and there are new conditions and new procedures exactly so it is with the one who is changed from being married to the law to be married to Christ there are new conditions new principles of action whereas in the terms of being married to the law the law said you will not get forgiveness in heaven unless you keep this law perfectly if you don't keep it perfectly you are cursed as soon as you come to faith in

Christ the terms and conditions are different the new terms and conditions are not work work work but have faith alone in Christ and you get forgiveness and life and heaven so the first terms are work work and work but when you're married to Christ the terms are believe go on believing and believe still more it's all of faith whereas the first husband it was all of works now it's all of believing it is from faith to faith as it is said the just shall live by faith conditions are different let me come to my second illustration supposing now we have before us a woman of high rank in life let us say a princess or something of that order let's suppose in this princess he's being wooed by two suitors two high born men one will say is the king's son and the other will say is the king's enemy now this woman has to choose between the king's son and the king's enemy which will she choose well she has to sit down and think if she marries the king's son then she has the king's favor and blessing but if she chooses to marry the king's enemy she has the king's wrath and the king's curse now I know my illustration is not perfect in some respects but that really is the condition that sinners have to face if you want to get the blessing of the king of heaven you must not marry the wrong one if you remain married to the law then the curse of heaven is on you because you are a breaker of the law if you marry Christ the king son then the blessing and the peace and the pardon of God and heaven and glory are yours there's one thing about this illustration of mine that I want to correct God's law in itself is not hateful to God and that is the point that Paul corrects himself when you come to verse 7 which I just want to read to you what shall we say then is the law sin you see it's very hard to illustrate these things without making a necessary correction the illustration Paul has used and the illustration indeed that I have used might lead you to think that the law is a bad thing is the law sin says Paul God forbid nay I had not known sin but by the law and a little bit later on in verse 12 notice he says wherefore the law is holy and the commandment holy and just and good the law is good in itself but it is no good for sinners and our condition is that of being sinners so the law cannot help us anymore in the sense of giving us life and salvation so now I come to my third heading

I've said to you first of all that the unconverted man is married to the law secondly I've said as soon as you are converted to Christ then you become divorced from the law as a covenant of life now I come to my third heading which is this when we believe in Christ Christ becomes our second husband we receive a new standing with God we receive his blessing we pass into his family we receive forgiveness we receive heaven we become entitled to eternal life and the second marriage makes us fruitful I've mentioned that before let me repeat it in case we've forgotten the point you cannot do one good work before you become a Christian all the praying of unconverted people is abomination to God all the church worship of unconverted people is worthless to

God all the singing of psalms or hymns or anthems of men and women who are not converted doesn't count for that much to God now they ought to do these things it is a greater sin if they don't come to church it is a greater sin if men do not pray and keep the Lord's day but all their keeping of these things is worthless because they do not love God they are married to the law and they are under a curse cursed is their worship cursed is their singing cursed is their praying cursed is their everything because they are married to the law and there is no blessing with the law only when a man or a woman comes to Christ by faith do they begin to do right things in God's eyes spiritually right that is now this needs to be explained because people often misunderstand this unconverted people can be very good in many ways they can be very good as husbands very good as wives very good as subjects as workers they can be very good in government very good in the police or their jobs very good in all sorts of things but there is one critically important thing that they can never be good at unconverted people can never be good at pleasing

God or doing spiritually valuable service the unconverted man as I say and repeat cannot do one right thing even what he does which is formally right is spiritually wrong because it does not proceed from the motive of love for God and what men do which is not out of love for God is spiritually valueless there is a lot to think about in that statement but it is no more than the truth now then once we believe in Christ all changes all is reversed once we believe in Christ everything we do out of a motive of love for God is blessed and everything we do even when we go wrong is overruled by God for good and he gives us a reward of grace for every right thing we do in this life and he will give us heaven and degrees of glory depending upon our works which are done out of love for him how can this be what makes the Christian fruitful my friend it is the

[28 : 19] Holy Spirit in the heart of God's children that makes them fruitful and so I now come to two points with which I close I come to an illustration and then I want to face a very important question in some of your minds and that is what is then meant by saying that we are dead to the law first of all my illustration it's not my own it comes from a dear friend of mine and of others of us here the Reverend Stuart Olliot in his book on the epistle to the Romans at this point a splendid book and an excellent illustration first class illustration Mr.

Olliot's illustration is this imagine a young girl who is a servant girl and she takes a job with an unmarried man a bachelor and he's very demanding and he wants everything meticulous all the dust has to be taken off the furniture all the carpet swept to perfection everything gleaming windows shining furniture at its best tire well made up everything has to be spotless and immaculate a very demanding task for a young woman and at times she really resents it she says why should I work myself to death for this taskmaster of a man and then one day something wonderful happens this bachelor takes her aside and says my dear I offer you my hand in marriage will you accept me and she gladly accepts him marries him now he demands all that demanded before perfection but this time there's a new motive as she dusts tidies hooovers makes up beds makes meals she does it for the one she loves my husband anything I do for him is too little you see the motive is different newness of spirit not oldness of the letter that's exactly the point

Paul makes newness of spirit not oldness of the letter mr. olliot's illustration is perfect that's the difference so my final question with which I must now close is this has the law completely gone you see the text of verse four says we are dead to the law by the body of Christ so let this question go very deep into your minds it's the question which is all important has the law completely gone well there are two answers that Christians have given to this obviously some Christians say yes the law has gone in every sense that is wrong they are antinomians the true answer to the question is the law has gone in a sense but not in every sense the law has gone in a sense that we are no longer married to it under bondage to it condemned by it no longer cursed by it etc but the law is still there as the code and rule of everyday living in other words my lord now says to me my second husband says to me my son if you love me keep my commandments and I say lord but I thought I was clear of the commandments and they're back again yes yes but they're back in a new way before they condemned you now they will never condemn you the law will never never condemn you however short of it you come

I will never condemn you but I want you to go back to those as the rules for directing your life if you want to live a fruitful life glorifying me upon earth with my blessing and reward in great measure when you come to the end of life what I want you now to do my son is out of love for me do your uttermost sincere best to keep those laws in the spirit of them as well as in the letter of them work it out as a salvation not indeed as a means to earning life because you've already got life in me but as a means to honouring me and you see that must be the right answer because if we say that the law has completely gone in every sense then we would have to say that Christ has saved us in order to make us sinners because by the law is the knowledge of sin whereas in fact

Christ has not saved us to sin but from sin and yet when all is said and done we can never perfectly keep these commandments and yet we long to do so and it's because we know better than we do that the apostle goes on at the end of this chapter to say the good that I would I do not etc now let me finish by reading of words and I would like you to turn to them if you would as we close now 1st Corinthians 9 20 and 21 1st Corinthians 9 20 and 21 let's read at verse 20 to get the sense and unto the Jews I became as a Jew that I might gain the Jews to them that are under the law as under the law that I might gain them that are under the law to them that are without law as without law now then the bracket being not without law to

[34 : 28] God but under the law to Christ that I might gain them that are without law I want you to look at that bracket and I want you to reassure yourself that Paul is saying in verse 21 those Gentiles who did not have the Old Testament law to them as far as possible I lived and preached as a man without law and then he says but wait a minute I've got to qualify this haven't I not without law to God but under the law to Christ the Greek is interesting en nomo Christo en nomos Christo that is to say under the obligation of law to Christ I am in Lord to Christ that's the best possible translation in Lord to Christ and I put it to you like that because if you're not familiar with the Greek language go back to that question and study it in the commentaries reassure yourself that even the apostle who says that he is without law says not absolutely

I am without law but not in every sense the law is still my rule but it is the law to Christ well friends as I close who are you married to today to the law or to Christ you must answer that and how you answer it depends and determines your whole eternity You