

**SIN AND DEATH; AN ILLUSTRATION FROM MARRIAGE
ROMANS 7:1-13**

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Sometimes I think we have problems understanding salvation and our new lives in Christ as explained in the New Testament because we don't know what it cost people to become Christians in the New Testament days.

When one became a Christian in New Testament times, they would face immediate threats from two different directions. First, because of their identity with Judaism, the Romans looked down on them. Remember, we said that the Jews had been kicked out of Rome. Second, if one was a Jew and gave their life to Jesus, they would be immediately ostracized from their family and old friends.

Rome started to blame all her problems on Christians. The Romans said the Christians were cannibals because they would eat the Body of Christ each week and drink His blood. Christians would be tortured and killed for their faith; it is in this context that we must understand salvation and life in Christ.

Because it doesn't cost us anything to become Christians in the United States, we have somehow lost the true meaning of what it means to be saved by grace through faith, and what it means to live godly lives. But what we have learned to do is to play and act like Christians. We learn to say the right things and act the right way when we are around other Christians, but the real key is, how is God changing your life?

You know, we all learn to use religious language pretty early let me give you an example of how even little kids learn this at a very young age. One of the members of a church I used to pastor had a cabin on a lake in Wisconsin. One weekend, I decided to go visit them. While we were sitting on the deck having coffee, their little boy came running

full speed holding a rat above his head. He was yelling to his mother, “Don’t be afraid mom, he’s dead. We beat him and bashed him and thumped him until ...,” then, catching sight of me he added in a lower and more reverent voice, “... until God called him home.”

I think that’s basically the problem with us. We have learned to use religious language and we have learned to act religious; but that is not what true Christianity is all about.

I think Christians often fall into two faulty approaches to living the Christian life. Either we become very legalistic or we presume on God’s gift of salvation to mean that we can do anything we want and still call ourselves Christians. Here is what Paul says salvation has accomplished for us: **WE HAVE BEEN SET FREE FROM RELIGIOUS RULES AND REGULATIONS IN ORDER TO PURSUE OUR LOVE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.** We have been forgiven of our sins so that we can be in a relationship with a holy God.

I. **FREEDOM FROM LEGALISM (Vs. 1-6)**
LEGALISM BRINGS BONDAGE, FEAR, JUDGMENTAL ATTITUDES, HIDING HYPOCRISY AND DEATH.

Verses 1-6 remind us that salvation by grace through faith is meant to set us free from legalism. Legalism is a killer: **LEGALISM BRINGS BONDAGE, FEAR, JUDGMENTAL ATTITUDES, HIDING, HYPOCRISY, AND DEATH.**

A. **WHO ARE YOU IN LOVE WITH? (Vs. 1-3)**

In verses 1-3, Paul asks us, “Who are you in love with?” Many of us are in love with religion; many of us are in love with the image we project and many of us are just plain in love with ourselves. But for Paul, our first love is to be God. Look how he starts

verse 1; he says, “Don’t you know brothers and sisters?” He has used that phrase two times in chapter 6. In chapter 6, verse 3 Paul said, “Don’t you know that you were baptized into the Jesus’ death?” Then he went on to explain that our conversion joined us with Jesus’ death on the cross. We died to sin and when we died to sin, we received new identities in Christ. We are now to be identified with the resurrection of Jesus; we received new life in Christ. We described this in terms of immigration and taking on a new citizenship.

In chapter 6, verse 16 Paul described the conversion process as a slave taking on a new master. He said, “Don’t you know that whoever you obey becomes the master and you become his slave?” He then went on to point out that before we became believers, we were slaves to sin; all that sin paid out was a life of shame and eternal separation from God ... death.

At conversion, we gained a new master, a loving master. This master doesn’t treat us as slaves he treats us like family, he showers us with gifts of righteousness and eternal life in His continued presence.

So Paul has described for us conversion in terms of new citizenship and new servant/master relationships. In this section he describes the conversion process as taking on a new lover. Paul is saying, “Since Jesus broke the hold of sin over us, and since our relationship with sin is dead, the Law of judgment concerning sin has no power over us. We have taken on a new lover, Jesus. In that relationship grace rules, not law. When we were married to sin, our lives were clearly headed for death but in our new relationship with Jesus, our lives are headed for life.

Now commentators and scholars try to make Paul's example into an allegory. They try to figure out who the husband is and who the wife is, and how the relationship changes; I think the answer is much simpler than all of that. Paul has been describing what our lives should look like after salvation. His point is this he demonstrates how laws work, in two different situations, the same act could be wrong once, and perfectly acceptable at another time. While we are married, if we were to date another man or woman, or even marry, the law condemns that as adultery. In Paul's day, the law demanded the adulterers to be punished by death. However, if we are single, or our spouse dies, we are perfectly free to date and to get married. The law of adultery does not apply. Do you get that?

Before conversion, we were married to sin. The law of sin, death, judgment, and condemnation applied to us. At conversion, we died to sin and we chose to no longer serve sin or have any relationship with sin. We were divorced from sin. We could sum it up by saying that at conversion, we severed all ties with sin. Legally we are free. We became free to enter a love relationship with God. The new law of grace permitted us to come to God even though we could never be righteous or clean enough to stand in the presence of a holy God.

So we could sum this section up by saying that at conversion, we divorce sin and marry righteousness. We are released from trying to earn our salvation by being religious, but make no mistake the standard of righteousness is far beyond any religious law or system. So who are we in love with? Hopefully our answer is God.

B. WHAT KIND OF FRUIT IS THAT RELATIONSHIP PRODUCING?
(Vs. 4-5)

In verses 4-5 Paul goes on to ask, “What kind of fruit is that relationship producing? Here is where legalism, self-righteousness, and religion fool people. There are people out there that do all kinds of religious stuff and pretend to be holy. Let me quickly quote Jesus in Matthew 7 as He talks about good and bad fruit, “Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you,’ away from me, you evildoers.” Jesus said in that section saved people will do the will of God by producing fruit that comes from the Spirit. If we are truly in a relationship with Jesus then our lives should be characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Why is that a great test of salvation? Because we can’t make ourselves be like that that only comes from being in an intimate relationship with Jesus in which His Holy Spirit manifests Himself in us through these qualities. That process is described in Jesus’ example of the branch abiding in the vine and producing fruit in John 15.

What should cause us to perhaps question whether or not we have authentic saving faith? Paul says in Galatians that the fruit of a wrong relationship produces sexual immorality, impure thoughts, eagerness for lustful pleasure, idolatry, participation in demonic activities, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, divisions, the feeling that everyone is wrong except you and those in your own little group, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other kinds of sin.

Here is the point; you can’t be in a true relationship with Jesus and be an angry, critical, judgmental, arrogant person. A relationship with sin, with Satan, and with the

world produces those kinds of attitudes. There are many religious people like this, aren't there?

However, humility, grace, and love ... those are characteristic of those who have a genuine relationship with Jesus. Here is how Paul contrasts the two; unbelievers are controlled by the sinful passions carried out in the members of their bodies. That kind of lifestyle ultimately leads to heartache and death. On the other hand, believers, who have been united to Christ in His death and who now belong to Him in resurrection, will produce the gifts and lifestyle of Holy Spirit fruit and gifts. What kind of fruit is your relationship producing? Hopefully, fruit of the Spirit.

C. HOW FREE DOES THIS LOVE MAKE YOU? (V. 6)

And in verse 6 Paul asks, "How free does this love make you?" Let me say this, because there may be some authentic exceptions, in general, if you are in an authentic relationship with Christ, you should be experiencing a lot of spiritual freedom in life. On the other hand, when we worship idols, or the things of this world, we should be experiencing spiritual and emotional bondage.

Now I want to stick with the passage here. In this section, Paul has primarily been talking about the Mosaic Law, that Law that governed the Jewish religion however, in Rome, the people also had an extreme reverence for Roman law. For us, it could refer to any set of religious laws. Legalists, moralists, and religious people somehow imagine that our relationship with God depends on our obedience to the rules.

Here is the problem with that line of thinking. If anyone thinks that they can keep the rules, they are sadly mistaken. I don't care what set of rules you choose, let's take driving as an example; no matter how careful we are all of us have broken the rules of

road at one time or another. But somehow, the legalist convinces himself that if he has not gotten a ticket it means he has not broken the rules, in reality, it only means that he was lucky enough to not get caught by a policeman.

Religious legalists tend to categorize sin, or redefine it so their behavior is not sin. They redefine stealing. They redefine fornication. They redefine anger and judgmentalism. However, all it does it deceives them. Another trick of legalists is to pretend they are holy. Are you the same person at work, at play, and at home that you are in church? We have become good at talking and acting like Christians when we are around other Christians but the fact is that Jesus had no use for hypocrites. You see, even though legalists tend to look spiritual on the outside, they have actually set their sights lower than those who live by grace. Jesus redefines the law, but He moves it upwards.

The legalist may not steal from or kill his neighbor, but the Christian, saved by grace through faith, in a loving relationship with God, is called to pray for and even do good deeds for his enemies. If you tend to judge or criticize others, or if you somehow think you are more spiritual or better than others ... in fact if you even compare yourself to others, then the chances are that you are not in a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Before conversion, we were in a relationship with sin. The law said, because of this relationship with sin, we deserve death. When we died to sin at conversion, we were united with Christ. He nullified that law forever. If that's the case, then we are free from the letter of the law, where rules, regulations, religious junk, laws, have no power to deliver us from sin. We have been released from the law in order to serve the Spirit, who carries us far above the letter of the law.

We are free from trying to keep laws. We are now free to become like our Lord and Savior Jesus. We all have learned to talk all the right stuff but the question is do we believe it? We all talk about servant-hood. My friend gave me this nice saying this week. He said, “John, if you really want to know if you have a servant’s heart, then check out how you feel when people treat you like one.”

You see, it really is freedom in Christ to let go of all worldly evaluations, desires, and definitions of success. Paul’s point is this: **RULE KEEPERS, RELIGIOUS PEOPLE, LEGALISTS, LEGALISM BRINGS BONDAGE, FEAR, JUDGMENTAL ATTITUDES, HIDING, HYPOCRISY, AND DEATH.**

Before we leave this section on legalism, there is one more point I want to address. If you are a legalist or moralist, I want you to understand the damage we can do to others. If you were raised under a legalistic form of Christianity I want you to understand what happens. There are people who really, authentically love God with all their hearts but if these people are raised under legalism, they will be driven to insanity. Remember, legalists are taught that our relationship with God is based on our obedience. As we get closer to God, we come to realize more and more how unholy we are. For those who understand grace, the more God’s love is felt. For those under law, the more hopeless they become. They start to despair that God would ever love or accept them. I’m here this morning to shatter that lie. The Apostle Paul has made it abundantly clear that we are saved by grace through faith ... not keeping religious rules and regulations.

II. **FREEDOM FROM LICENSE (Vs. 7-13)**
FREEDOM FROM RELIGIOUS RULES AND REGULATIONS DOESN’T MEAN WE NO LONGER HAVE STANDARDS. IN FACT, THE STANDARDS FOR LIVING ARE MUCH HIGHER.

Now just as some people wanted to focus on rules and regulations, there were others that thought salvation meant they could do anything they wanted. However, in verses 7-13, Paul reminds us that we have freedom from license as well. **FREEDOM FROM RELIGIOUS RULES AND REGULATIONS DOESN'T MEAN WE NO LONGER HAVE STANDARDS. IN FACT, THE STANDARDS FOR LIVING ARE MUCH HIGHER.**

I often know right away when I am dealing with proud people or people who are just interested in quick fixes for their problems. I will say, "You know, we are saved by grace through faith. There is not one thing you can do to earn or keep your salvation." They will immediately respond, "Then that means that I can do anything I want." In other words they are saying, "Then I can go ahead and break all the rules, I can go on having illicit sex, I can steal, and kill, and lie."

A. A LEGAL EDUCATION (V. 7)

But as we will see, Paul is saying we are now free to serve a higher law, the law of grace. In verse 7 Paul gives us a legal education. At the beginning of verse 7 he picks up another familiar phrase. "What shall we say then?" Before he said, "Shall we continue to sin in order to make grace more abundant? Shall we continue to sin because we are no longer under law but grace?" Here he asks, "Is the law sin?" We are now free from the law, so does that mean that the law is bad? He answers this question just like he answered the other two previous ones, "Heck No!" In this verse Paul informs us that one very important reason for the law was to inform us of what sin is. He says if the law had not told me that coveting was wrong, I wouldn't have known that. Let me give you an example; let's say there are two toddlers who are playing. One takes his plastic hammer,

reaches over and bops the other on the head. The victim cries out and the mommy comes over and says, “No, don’t do that. That’s not nice,” and then he starts to cry and wail as well. The toddler had no idea that hitting someone on the head with a hammer was wrong ... until his mother told him. Now to be sure, the next time he does that, mom will emphasize the wrongness of that act a little more forcefully.

There is a lot of debate in chapter 7 over who the “I” is. Is Paul referring to himself as an individual, is he referring to the nation of Israel to which he belongs, to Adam to whom he is related as a human being, or to the entire human experience which he also belongs to. I know theologians and commentators make their living on this stuff, legitimately all these views have merit, and there is truth that we are all related to Adam, to Israel, to Paul, and to one another. Paul’s experience is linked to Adam’s, to Israel’s and to ours. Let’s read this as Paul’s journey, but our journey as well.

The very timing of the law is interesting. God had just delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt. God was preparing them to enter the Promised Land but they had all kinds of bad habits and behaviors so God had to teach them right from wrong. It is at this time that God gives the law to the Hebrew nation. The law, in essence, both shows us the nature and holiness of God, while at the same time shows us how far from that holiness we are because of sin. In fact, while Moses was up on the mountain getting the law the Israelites were down in the camp, making a golden idol, getting drunk having sex, and worshipping the golden calf. God gave Israel the law so that they could learn right from wrong. So the law is still useful for us in that it gives us insight into how holy God is and how sinful we are. The insincere person we talked about earlier should never say, “Then I can go and do what I want, if I’m saved by grace,” he should instead say, “I just can’t

believe the amount of grace it actually takes to save me.” You see, if we really understand the price Jesus paid for our sin, how could we even consider sinning again?

B. A LEGAL JUDGMENT (Vs. 8-11)

Verses 8-11 seem to pick up on this theme and render a legal judgment. Paul makes it very clear that the law is not the problem ... sin is. Look at verse 8; it is sin that produces sinful thoughts in me. Look at verse 11; sin deceives me. I think the temptation is to try and read more into these verses than I think Paul intends. For example, is this Paul’s preadolescent life described in verse 9? If so, then is this verse saying that children under the age of 13, the usual Bar Mitzvah age, are innocent? You see at age 13 Jewish boys and girls make a public declaration of their intention to follow the Jewish law. They become sons and daughters of the law, that’s what Bar or Bat Mitzvah means. I don’t think that is what Paul is referring to here. Some commentators talk about Paul’s adolescent sexual awakening here but that is much too complicated. I think this experience applies to all of us before and after we are believers. Think about it; let’s say I am according to the world, a normal young adult, society teaches me that is both desirable and normal to be sexually active. Even if I become a Christian, it would be possible for me to think being sexually active is normal and desirable ... until one day I read in the bible that fornication and sexual immorality are deplorable in God’s sight. Now the command to be sexually pure is meant to help me enjoy life free from the worry of sexual disease or unwanted pregnancy but instead that command to be sexually pure now makes me feel guilty. Now sin starts to play with me again. It deceives me into questioning whether or not God’s way is right. The more I focus on this behavior, the

harder it is to quit now I feel condemned and more hopeless. So it's not the law, but my relationship with or past history with sin that's the problem.

I'm thankful that God doesn't reveal all my sin to me at one sitting, I couldn't handle that. It would simply overwhelm me. Further, I think we have to have a healthy understanding of grace. God will reveal a sin in my life to me through my devotions in the Bible, listening to a sermon, or a friend speaking to me. All of a sudden my peaceful life is rocked I must struggle and fight this sin in my life. Now here is where my understanding of God and grace have to balance the situation, as I fight against this sin, I am not fighting for my salvation, I am not fighting so God will accept me, I am fighting for my freedom and I am fighting because God already loves me and accepts me.

C. A LEGAL INTERPRETATION (Vs. 12-13)

Verses 12-13 give us a legal interpretation. In these two verses, Paul says that in addition to teaching us what sin is, the law is meant to show us how bad sin is. Sin is devastating; sin leads to death ... eternal separation from God. God warned Israel before they entered the Promised Land if they refused to obey the law, He would kick them out of the land. The problem was God knew they would not keep the law because the law in itself has no power to change lives it is only the grace of God. They rejected God over and over again, until God did kick them out of the land.

But back to the law: The law is holy, the commandments are holy and they are righteous and good. Now listen carefully; we are free from the law not because the law is wrong, we are free from the law that we may serve an even higher law. Let me give you an example; the law says, "Thou shall not commit adultery." So if I am not having sex with another woman, then technically I am not committing adultery. Under grace I am

free from that law but my life under grace doesn't say that it is o.k. for me to commit adultery, my life under grace commands me to love my wife like Christ loved the church. You see, it's pretty easy not to commit adultery but it is much harder to actively love my wife like Jesus loved the church. The law said to tithe 10% of my money, that's pretty easy. Under grace I am released from giving 10%; however that doesn't mean that I will quit giving 10%, life under grace commands me to acknowledge that 100% of what I have belongs to God. The law says don't murder but life under grace says watch the way you talk to people and be careful what comes out of your mouth. The law is meant to teach us what sin is, and how horrible its consequences are. However, since we are free from the law, that doesn't give us permission to live in any way we want.

We must keep in mind the other examples Paul gave us of conversion. We have new identities in Christ; we are children of God, citizens of heaven, we have a new master, the Lord Jesus Christ we will serve Him through righteousness. We have a new lover, our old lover, sin, only brought us heartache and death. Our new lover, God, brings us blessings that lead to life. **FREEDOM FROM RELIGIOUS RULES AND REGULATIONS DOESN'T MEAN WE NO LONGER HAVE STANDARDS. IN FACT, THE STANDARDS FOR LIVING ARE MUCH HIGHER.**

So when Paul says we are no longer under law but grace, I hope we hear two things. First, we can never earn or deserve God's forgiveness. He saves us because He loves us. Salvation is His free gift of grace that we receive through faith. Because of that, we do not have to worry about being judged according to any religious law. Salvation frees us from judgment so our lives should not be spent trying to keep rules and regulations in order to earn God's love or acceptance. Jesus did that for us. But second,

being free doesn't mean free from responsibility. We are called to be living examples of God's grace. Living according to God's grace sets a standard of living high above any sort of religious law we now live by the law of love: **WE HAVE BEEN SET FREE FROM RELIGIOUS RULES AND REGULATIONS IN ORDER TO PURSUE OUR LOVE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.**

You see, all the rules change once we are saved. Worldly values and measures no longer apply to us. When Jesus challenged the rich young ruler to let go of the law and to live by grace by selling all he had, giving it to the poor and following Him, the young man hung his head and walked away. It was much easier for him to live according to law than grace in Christ.

However, James Montgomery Boice tells the story of another young man who understood exactly what it meant to be in love with God and to live by grace.

He said quite a few years ago, William Borden went to the Yale University as an undergraduate and afterward became a missionary candidate planning to work in China. He made his decision to invest his life in this service, and many of his friends thought him to be foolish. He came from a good family, he had wealth and influence. And they said, "Why are you going to throw away your life in some foreign country. When you can have such an enjoyable and worthwhile life here." But William Borden of Yale had heard the call of God. Now while in Egypt on the way to China, even before he had much of a chance to do anything, he became sick. Soon, it was evident to everyone, including himself that he would die. At this point, Borden could have said to himself, what a waste. My friends were right. I could have stayed in New Haven, but Borden didn't think this way, as he laid on his death bed in Egypt, he scribbled a farewell note to his friend that was in some sense of his epitaph. The note said, "No reserve. No retreat. No regret."

Is that the way, we think about our love relationship with God? This is a guy who knew what it meant to be in love. This is a guy who didn't live according to the rules and regulations of any religion or any worldly standard. We have to let go of our worldly

standards and try to impress people with our righteousness and holiness because that, doom to failure. We may be able to fool one another. We may even fool ourselves, but we will never be able to fool God.