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Romans 7:1-6; 6:1-14

TRUE LIBERTY FOR ALL

We talk so much in our nation about liberty. And this is one of the greatest themes of the Bible.

However, we are certainly not a nation of free people, we have certain wonderful freedoms: of speech, to elect our representatives in government, to assemble like we are this morning.

However, most people in our land are in some sort of bondage. Some are slaves to their debt. Others are slaves to booze and other drugs. Others are slaves to habits and hang-ups, which keep them from living life to its fullest.

Generally, people are slaves to what the Bible calls “sin,” where (as Paul describes in Romans 7) they do things, which they know that they should be doing and that they even want to be doing. They seem chained to some strange dark side and their own human natures. And even the most sincere find themselves crying out, like Paul did: “Who shall deliver me from this old sinful part of my human nature?”

The fact is that many professing Christians know very little about the glorious liberty that is promised from Jesus Christ. Many are miserable, because they cannot live up to the high standards of God’s laws, to which they fervently aspire. Or they cannot successfully keep all the rules and regulations of the particular religious fellowship, to which they want to belong.

They try so hard to discipline themselves and to live up to rules and regulations for the Christian life. It’s like: “God gave me a clean sheet, and now it is up to me to keep it clean.” But when they cannot, they live in frustration and defeat, and they have little joy in their Christian lives. (That would pretty well describe “yours truly,” for much of my Christian life.) There are very few Christians, it seems, who truly enjoy “the glorious liberty of the sons of God.”

Well, to all fellow seekers, I have some “good news” this morning. It is the message of the cross, as you may have never understood it before.

It is found in a little-discussed passage of God’s Word. But it is time for us to look at it more carefully.

In Romans 7, an inspired Paul is trying to help us learn how to enjoy the true liberty of the sons of God.

“Brothers and sisters, surely you know that the law rules over people only while they are alive. For example, a woman must stay married to her husband as long as he is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from the law of marriage. But if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, the law says she is guilty of adultery. But if her husband dies, she is free from the law of marriage. Then if she marries another man, she is not guilty of adultery.

“In the same way, my brothers and sisters, your old selves died, and you became free from the law through the body of Christ. This happened so that you might belong to someone else—the One who was raised from the dead—and so that we might be used in the service of God. In the past, we were ruled by our sinful selves. The law made us want to do sinful things that controlled our bodies, so the things we did were bringing us to death. In the past, the law held us like prisoners, but our old selves died (with Christ on that cross), and we were made **free from the law**. So now we serve God in a **new way**, with the Spirit, and not in the **old way** with written rules (and regulations)!”

Let’s look at it closely. The first thing that the Word of God describes is...

I THE ODD COUPLE

In Romans 7, the regulations of religion (law) and Jesus are compared with two rivals, who are in love with the same woman. We are the woman, and we have to decide with which of the two suitors we are going to say, with Mr. Jesus or with Mr. Law.

Here is the illustration: Paul says that a woman is bound to her husband, while the husband is alive. If, while the husband is alive, she goes with another man, she is an adulteress. But if the husband dies, she is free to marry another man, and she is not an adulteress.

So, in this situation, if a couple is not doing well in their marriage, they have to wait until one of the two dies!

Now even if the husband were abusive, even a tyrant, the poor wife would have to do the best she could, but no hope would ever exist for her...no divorce! But if he dies, then she is free.

It’s interesting, my friends, that in this passage you and I are portrayed as the wife. And “Mr. Law” is the husband.

And Mr. Law is very tough to live with. He is very strict. And yes, he is perfect. He is holy. He is righteous. He has a rule for everything, and he doesn’t forgive one slip-up.

Now the problem with this couple is not just that he is so perfect, but she has a sinful nature. She has a sinful streak in her makeup. She just can't seem to make herself do right. She is often slipping-up.

This is really **the odd couple!**

(Now mind you, I am not saying that anything is wrong with God's law, His Ten Commandments, or with religion's rules and regulations. They are perfect.

The trouble is with us. We can't live up to the demands of the law. So we are in a tough relationship!)

Just try to imagine this woman, who has the tendency to disobey, to rebel, who is weak and full of failures...who is a child of Adam's fallen race, inheriting this sinful condition...being married to a righteous and requiring and never forgiving man. It must be Hell on earth!!

And this poor woman has no hope, because Mr. Law is healthy and well, and he will never die!

Jesus Himself said that "until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter nor stroke of the law will pass away." So Mr. Law is not going to die. There is no hope in sight. The poor woman is stuck!

The situation is unbearable with this man. He has a commandment for every thing, every detail. And he would punish her, if she would fail. Always there are threats and reproaches. There is constant complaining, condemnation, and guilt.

It's the same way with you and me, when we try to be good Christians by struggling to keep a bunch of rules and regulations. Frustration, failure, and miserable guilt are every day occurrences.

And, you know, Mr. Law has many allies. One is the Bible. Mr. Law loves the Bible. He goes with the Bible in one hand and a club in the other. (Now I love the Bible. It is the Bible that gives me this message of hope, which I am trying to bring to you today. But many legalistic people have misused the Bible, in order to club others and try to force others to do the things, which they want them to do.)

The Pharisees, of Jesus' day, knew the Bible. But Jesus accused them of using it to make heavy burdens for others to bear, which they could not even bear themselves. Their religious rules and regulations, which they claimed to be from the Bible, did not make people better. They only defeated them.

Also Mr. Law has many books and many preachers, who peddle his wares for him. And this is why many people do not attend church, because they know they are going to be scolded. And they know that they cannot do what the preachers tell them to do.

And many times they know that even the preachers do not do what they preach! But these legalistic preachers continue to help Mr. Law to put the guilt trip on us.

My friends, Mr. Law cannot make us, nor even help us, do what we are supposed to do. We have an inherited sinful nature. And the more that we are forbidden something, the more attractive that thing is. The more we want to do it. We are so weak!

We are like a tree of sin. And the tree of sin produces “sins.” And when we see our sinful fruit, and the preachers point it out to us, we cry, we repent, we say that we are sorry. So we clean up all of those sinful fruits, and they are thrown into the furnace. And we are glad for a season.

But the next season, the fruits on sin return again. Because we are a tree of sins, and that is what we produce.

And rules and regulations are no solution. The law is weak, because the law cannot help us with our inability to do right. We have the willingness, but we do not have the ability to live righteously. God’s Word has it right: “There is none righteous, no not one. For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” “The good that I would, I do not, and the things which I hate, I find myself doing.”

So the preaching of rules and regulations is of no value against fleshy indulgence. It only produces guilt and condemnation, so we feel miserable. Then our self-esteem is on the floor..

The simple fact is that rules and regulations of the law do not produce holiness! We need more than rules. We need a whole new system, another way to be righteous. Otherwise we are lost..

So this is an odd couple. He is perfect and right, always. And she is hopeless.

So what is the solution to this problem? Jesus will have to go to work on the situation.

Jesus says: “Poor woman. She disobeys. She revolts. She cannot do what her husband, Mr. Law, tells her.”

And her husband can’t understand that she cannot do what he requires. He’s so dry. He’s so cold. You talk to him and he doesn’t hear. You try to reason with him, and he doesn’t understand. He doesn’t answer back. Hey, man, he’s a stone! What an odd couple. What a sad situation! Now notice what Jesus does to help. He causes...

II THE GLORIOUS FUNERAL

When Jesus sees this odd couple, He says: “You know, I love this poor woman. I would like to help her. But I can’t, because she’s married to that man.”

“And he looks very healthy! I don’t think he is going to die soon.” “But I know what I can do. I can kill her and then raise her up to a new life. And then I can marry her! And then I will love her and understand her and help her!”

And that, my friend, is what the cross is all about. That’s the reason for the cross.

Jesus Christ did not die for Himself. He did not need a death. He did not need salvation. He needed nothing.

He died only and exclusively “for us” (Romans 5:8). He died to give us that death, which we so desperately needed to set us free and to get us out of that terrible marriage to Mr. Law!

Many times that woman had said, “I would prefer to be dead than married to this...man.”

Jesus says: “Do you prefer death? I have one to offer you. I died for you on the cross.”

Now Jesus knew that the woman didn’t love her old husband...that she was even afraid of Mr. Law.

Jesus said: You know, if she were my wife, it would be different. I would love her. I would forgive her. I would make her love me. And when you love somebody, it is easier to please them. And I would give her my ever-present understanding and help. I would be with her continually.”

So Jesus—in His great love for you and me---went to the cross, and died for us, in order to set us free from our marriage and Mr. Law...from our dependence on rules and regulations. And now we are free to live a new kind of a life...a life of love and joyful service...with Him as our new husband!

This Bible says: “Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the law through the body of Christ.”

Another version says: “So my brothers, the death of Christ on the cross has made you dead to the claims of the law.”

Another version says: “Your husband, your master, used to be the Jewish law, but you died, as it were, with Christ on the cross; and since you are dead, you are no longer married to the law. And it has no more control over you.”

That’s why, when I think of the cross, I try to imagine it, with me hanging there. That’s what made Christ my Savior. He died for me. He set me free from the condemnation and guilt and punishment of the law.

That's what baptism is supposed to illustrate to us (Roman 6:1-2). We were buried with Jesus, so we can live a new life, free from the misery of trying to live under the constant demands of Mr. Law, with its frustrating rules and regulations. Baptism is literally our "death certificate" that we are now free from Mr. Law!!

Many people today give-in to more sin than they should, because of their low self-esteem. They feel like they are no good, anyway. So what does it matter if they put more garbage into a life, that is already a worthless garbage can?

And many people go into drugs and sex and lies and pornography. Why not? Everyone tells me that I am bad. Even the church tells me that, when it waves all of those laws in my face.

But when is somebody going to lift me up?

Well, someone wants to lift you up. His name is Jesus.

He loves you so much that he died in your place, so you could be free from condemnation and guilt and free to live a wonderful new life with Him.

You don't even need to feel guilty that your sins made Him die. Some preachers try to make us feel guilty that Jesus had to die for our sins. No! You should be excited and flattered that He wanted to die for you..

The Bible says that Jesus could chose if He wanted to die or not. He said, "I have the power to lay down my life or not. I do it voluntarily." Paul says that Jesus, "seeing the joy that was before Him (of that new relationship with us, gladly) died on the cross for us."

Do you know, that makes me feel great! I have value. God's only Son was to die, voluntarily and joyfully, for me. Mt goodness, God, do I have so much value to you?!"

And Jesus says: "Yes, you do. I truly love you"(John 3:16)! Do you know, this Suitor—Mr. Jesus—truly does love us! "Nobody has more love than this, that he lays down his life for his friends. But God demonstrated His love toward us in that, while we were rebellious sinners, Christ died for us."

Oh, how wonderful. How it fills me with appreciation and hope! This leads us to our third consideration...

III THE NEW LOVE AFFAIR

Since Jesus has done all this for me... since He died in my place so I could be free from my miserable relationship with Mr. Law—I have fallen deeply in love with this divine Suitor, Jesus Christ. And I recognize that, since I died on the cross with Him, I am now free to marry another One, the One who died and rose again for me. And I want to be joined and intimately involved, in every part of my life, with this Lover of my soul. Now I want to show my love and gratitude, by trying to please Jesus and by producing something great in my life for Him!

But a word of caution, my friend. Remember that it was not Mr. Law, who died. He is still alive and well. And He is now widower!

And he will be looking for a new girlfriend! And where does he go to find girl friends? To church! Because he knows that in church there are certain people, who are very weak and are always looking for something!

And Mr. Law looks very appealing to them. Rules and regulations have a great appeal to religious people. And many fall into his trap and go back to Mr. Law.

But I don't want to go back to him. No! I have found a very loving, understanding Person. Instead of being married to an unfeeling stone, I have found a Person—in my loving Jesus—who has shown great love to me. That is a tremendous difference.

And now I live “in the Spirit.” That means that I am continually conscious of Jesus presence, leading me. And this is very new and wonderful, compared to my old relationship with Mr. Law.

So the key to this new life is not to go back to Mr. Law, but to cultivate my relationship with Jesus. And then holiness is very, very simple. I just try to please my loving new husband.

So (wedding march), we marry Jesus Christ. We become His. He is our Husband, our Bridegroom, our Head, our Friend, our Lover. And we begin to do what Jesus wants, apart from constant nagging of Mr. Law. Hallelujah! What glorious liberty!

And how different is this from the way that many of us have been in the past. Some, when we were young in our Christian lives, were always feeling guilty and crying and reconsecrating ourselves. We were defeated and miserable Christians, still feeling responsible to a lot of rules and regulations from our “ex”-husband, Mr. Law.

I'll tell you how it happens. In most of our churches, there is a mixture of the old and new covenant. There is no clear distinction between the two approaches to being right and holy. But these two approaches to holiness are so different that the new one makes the old approach obsolete, says the Bible.

And many born-again people try to live with two husbands, with Jesus and Mr. Law. And that is adultery!

and tried to do what the law says. Let me tell you my story. After I was saved, I knew about grace, but I lived under the law, because that was my church's (and college's) strong emphasis. So I did my best to follow the religious rules and regulations. I tried not to smoke, not to drink, nor to dance nor to go to movies...not to do all of those things which I was told were wrong.

But sometimes I failed. And when I failed, I felt miserable.

Then I remembered that there was the grace of God in Jesus. There was the blood of Jesus, which would cleanse me from all sin. So I would go to Jesus and say: "Dear Lord Jesus, please forgive me. I'm so sorry."

And He did forgive me. He cleansed me. And I felt strong again. So I went right back and tried to do what the law says.

Then when I failed again, I went back to Jesus and said: "Please, forgive me." And he forgave me. And I was strong again. So I went right back and tried to do what the law said.

And that was my way of life...a way of continual defeat and frustration. That is the life of millions of Christians today.

And the bible says that this is "adultery"...like sleeping with two husbands. It is horrible, when I keep coming back to Jesus to fix my life, so I can go back to living with Mr. Law and trying to live up to his demands. It's like a woman asking her husband to give her money, so he can go to a motel with a neighbor.

And Jesus must feel very hurt, when we ask Him to help us to be on good terms with Mr. Law. Listen: He died for us, so that we could be free from those rules and regulations. And when we insist on going back to Mr. Law, in order to live the Christians life, it hurts Jesus.

Look again at our Scripture: "Your husband, your master, used to be the Jewish law. But you died, as it were, with Christ on the cross. And since you are dead, you are no longer married to the law, and it has no more control over you. Then you came back to life again, when Christ did, and you are now a new person. And now you are married, so to speak, to the One Who rose from the dead, so that now you can produce good fruit (that is, good deeds) unto God."

My dear friends, don't go back and forth between legalism and your love relationship with Christ. Instead, give yourself wholly to Jesus. Abandon yourself into His arms. Trust Him.

You don't need the crutches of rules and regulations. Cultivate a growing and a spiritual relationship with Christ. Earnestly love Him. He is now your husband, your friend, your guard, your sustainer. In Him there is never guilt nor condemnation. There is always understanding and forgiveness.

And don't even flirt with Mr. Law!

When you are weak and tempted, tell your husband. Tell Jesus. He will tell you, "My grace is sufficient for you. My power is perfected in your weakness of your weakness."

Another version: "I am with you. That is all you need. My power shows up best in weak people."

What legalism and regulations cannot do, because of the weakness of our flesh, a vital new love relationship with Jesus can do.

Now many religious people are afraid of such true Biblical teaching. Many only feel safe with rules and regulations. Paul had to write Galatians and Colossians to counteract those, who tried to push other Christians back into the arms of Mr. Law.

Many churches today teach legalism and a negative righteousness. Many Pastors have not had a good day, unless people feel guilty and cry at the altar. Many people do not think it was a good sermon, unless they cried two handkerchiefs of tears.

But this repeated guilt and condemnation is not "the glorious liberty" that we have in Jesus Christ.

Instead, spend your effort in cultivating your close walk with Him, and you will find that you are having more victory than ever over sin. "Walk in the Spirit, and you will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh."

"For the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control. And there is no law that is against these things." Cultivating your relationship with Jesus will transform the life in a way that no set of rules can. And if you are bearing the fruits of the spirit, you will not be violating any true law of God.

This is the message of the cross. This is the true gospel...the goods news.

I once heard a true story of a woman, who was married to a tyrant. He was so self righteous and dictatorial, critical and unforgiving. He made constant demands of her, and she could never live up to all them. And he constantly reminded her of it. Her life was miserable!

Eventually, the husband died. The wife later married a new husband.

This new husband loved her and understood her and discussed things with her and was always ready to forgive her. It was so wonderful! She felt like a load of frustration and guilt had been lifted from her shoulders.

And it's funny. She started being able to do all the very same things, which the first husband had demanded. But it sort of came naturally. It came from the heart of gratitude for her new husband's gracious love.

This is the same idea that Paul is talking about in Romans 7. Only it was us, who died with Jesus on the cross, so we could be free from our old husband, Mr. Law.

And now we are free to live with and for Jesus. And it's a whole new ball game.

More and more, we find ourselves doing the very things that Mr. Law had demanded. But now it is a labor of love.

That is the true liberty, which only Jesus can offer. It is yours, today, if you will only accept it!