

HAPPILY REMARRIED

Romans 7:1–6

Dr. George O. Wood

Today we'll look at just the first 6 verses of Romans 7. Then next week we'll attempt to look at the rest of the chapter.

Romans 7:1–6 (NIV)

“Do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to men who know the law—that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives? For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man. So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God. For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death. But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.”

This letter to the Romans is like a beautifully-strung necklace of pearls. We miss its import if we simply focus in on one of the pearls at a time and forget that the necklace is made up of the beauty of arrangement of all the pearls together. The danger, therefore, of going through this book in any particular moment is that we might simply see one pearl and not relate it to the rest of what is on the necklace. We have, through systematic teaching, attempted to string this necklace in our memories and consciousness through looking at Romans point-by-point and paragraph-by-paragraph over these past months.

HAPPILY REMARRIED

Romans 7:1-6

Here in Romans 7 Paul is dealing with the question of the Law and how it relates to the Christian. We must remember, though, that Paul in this letter has already made some rather significant statements about the Law.

In the beginning of the second major section of this letter to the Romans, we spoke of our salvation. He indicates that the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the Law. This righteousness of God has been manifested in Christ Jesus. When we were looking at that point some months ago now, at the end of Romans 3, I used the illustration of when as a boy in China, I had let our dog loose in the streets and how dangerous a thing this was—and how, when the dog was found, my father threatened me with the worst beating of my life. My brother volunteered to take my punishment for me, which would have satisfied justice because it would have indeed taught me the lesson of, “You cannot do this.” But another would have borne my punishment. However, had my brother himself let the dog loose as I, he was in no moral way qualified to take my punishment for me since he himself was guilty of the deed. It is only the innocent person who can successfully take the punishment for another if the dispenser of the punishment or the judgment will allow it.

In the case of my father, he did not allow my brother to take my punishment. But in the case of our heavenly Father, He did allow His Son, our Older Brother Jesus, to take our punishment and to satisfy, therefore, the demands of the Law.

Paul develops this line of thinking through the letter to the Romans—that we are not justified with God on the basis of our works. Works are designed to satisfy the requirements of the Law. We can never be righteous in God’s eyes by that standard. We become righteous only through the righteousness achieved by Jesus Christ. When Jesus died on the cross, Paul says, if we truly believe in Him, we also were there present in that death. We were present in His burial, and we are also now present in His resurrection, seated with Him in the heavenly places.

HAPPILY REMARRIED

Romans 7:1-6

I compared this, by way of illustration, to the fact that from time to time here in the church I dedicate babies to the Lord. These babies, at the time I hold them, are not aware that someone is making an act of consecration on their behalf—literally offering them to God for His service and for His control. Yet they will live the rest of their life under the aura of this dedication until they come to the moment when they can make this decision for themselves to follow Christ and to act upon it.

In a very real way, therefore, God—who stands outside of time and space and for whom every moment can be eternally present—saw and gathered us all up in the person of Jesus Christ on the cross. That even though from a time vantage point where I am, two thousand years after the event, God stands outside time and space saw that through my belief, I was there on the cross, willing to be identified with Christ. When Christ died, I died. The old nature—the Adam-like nature I bore, destined for the dust and death—that also died and was buried. When Christ came alive through the power of the Spirit, I also came alive through the power of the Spirit. So that now in me and in you who believe, dwells Jesus Christ. The kingdom of God has come. The kingdom of God has come as seed in the soil. It has penetrated the environment, and it is growing up and coming to fruitage.

So the kingdom of God has come into your life. The rule and reign of God has entered. So even now it is like a seed that has been planted in a pot that is bound for extinction. This body, as it is, is dying and falling away. This outward nature is not being renewed. It is passing. It is going back to the dust. But because God has entered our life through Jesus Christ, we have come alive. And there is seed within us that is growing up unto eternal life. It is in this kind of an atmosphere, therefore, which we realize is at the background of this letter to the Romans. When we come to Romans 7, we treat that in the context of this teaching which has preceded it.

HAPPILY REMARRIED

Romans 7:1-6

Here in Romans 7, Paul is concerned to address the question, “Does the Law help us as Christians?” He has, in chapter 6, dealt with the question, “What about sin in the believer’s life?” And his response to the question, “Can we sin?” is, “Now that we have died with Christ, we are dead to sin.” And, although in our outward members sin is still trying to work its effect, we are to yield those members the way we’re to represent ourselves as living instruments—living slaves to God—so that from God’s point of view, sin has already been banished in our life. From our point of view, as we see it, we yet need to yield to the power of righteousness so that sin might, even in our outward nature, become less and less and less. There’s kind of a dynamic tension or paradox there. God sees our sin as completely banished. And we see that we are still fighting the mopping up operations of the war.

Paul, in Romans 7, is not now addressing so much the question of sin in the believer’s life as he is addressing what is the function of Law in the believer’s life. He uses, as an illustration to kick off the discussion, something from the Law. Namely, the illustration of marriage. He is indicating that the Law is in effect in a marriage while both parties to the marriage are living. But in the event the husband dies, the wife is freed from the law of marriage and, therefore, may remarry without violating the Law and being called an adulteress.

This text should be spoken of for a moment by itself before we relate it to the theological truth that Paul is tracing here. What he is saying, of course, in terms of the Law is a cardinal framework of successful marriage—that God has ordained from the beginning that there should be one man and one wife. And that this marriage is not to be broken. There are in the New Testament two exceptions which are granted by the Lord and by the Apostle Paul. One is in Matthew 5, on the grounds of infidelity and in the event reconciliation is impossible. The infidelity has become as death itself. And in 1 Corinthians 7, in the event an unbeliever

HAPPILY REMARRIED

Romans 7:1-6

absolutely refuses to live with a believer, then Paul indicates that individual believer is no longer bound to the law of marriage.

Also, I would think by deduction from 2 Corinthians 5:17: “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old has passed away, the new has come,” that what one has done prior to becoming a Christian has been put under the Blood and under the Cross. And the possibility of a new life is present, completely. So even marital failure before one has become a Christian is one which has been completely cleansed and closed by the blood of Christ—the grace of God He has chosen to elevate above His law.

Paul, in this particular segment of Scripture, is teaching us that our old husband has died if we have been united to Christ. You say, “I wasn’t even conscious of being married to an old husband. How could he have died? Who is this old husband that has died?” Commentators really get wrapped up in a discussion of who died. Some say the old one we were married to was the Law, and it was the Law that died. However, Paul does not state this. He indicates that the Law is still very much alive. We are the ones that died to the Law. It was not the Law itself that died. He will go on to confess in chapter 7 that the Law is holy and blameless and just and good. So it was not the Law that died. It was something that died to the power of the Law—our old husband. It would be very fitting, therefore, in looking at the context of Romans to recognize that what died is what went up to the cross with Jesus Christ—the old husband, the nature of Adam, the old humanity, the family that is bound for extinction and death and the wrath of God. Jesus took that on himself, and when He died, the old nature died. We have been freed from it, freed from the demands of the Law and, therefore, now free to remarry, free to remarry Christ. And it is this tremendous comparison that the apostle is anxious to trace in these verses.

If you are still married to the old husband, the Law, what are you married to? You’re married to what is being taught in Exodus 20, the Ten Commandments. You must perfectly fulfill what is

HAPPILY REMARRIED

Romans 7:1-6

written here. “You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not have any graven images, or the likeness of any image of God. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. You must remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. You must honor your father and mother. You must not kill. You must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not bear false witness against your neighbor. You must not covet.” In addition to this, Jesus in Matthew 5 traces the deeper intention of the Law and says murder is in the thought life, lust is in the thought life. And so, upon any account, if you have violated any Law of God you have failed to meet its demands, and, therefore, the sanction of the Law is imposed against you. “The soul that sins shall die” (Ezekiel 18).

The old husband had some rather rigid demands. He had a standard of perfection to which he demanded you relate to. And if you cannot relate to that standard of perfection, then in no way can your marriage be successful or can your marriage have any future.

People take various positions in regard to the Law. Some say, “I don’t care what the Law says. I’m going to do my own thing, regardless.” So they rebel against the Law, breaking the commandments of the Law left and right. Paul traces this kind of person in Romans 1, where he indicates all the kinds of things that are let loose when a person rebels against the Law. Others choose to simply ignore the Law.

And others, however, choose to feel that they are fulfilling the Law and making it on their own. We noted this at the close of the message last week. There are many who simply do not feel the need of Jesus Christ for salvation because already they feel that they have obtained a measure of acceptability and quality of life which does not need someone else taking their sin for them.

They are already good. Such a person who chooses to relate to the Law in this way, manifests certain characteristics. A characteristic, for example, of pride. It is a function of the Law to point out our weaknesses, but this person who is proud of being good and of having made it on their

HAPPILY REMARRIED

Romans 7:1-6

own is usually the person who isolates their strengths, and boasts on them, and forgets to be honest with themselves in noting the tremendous weaknesses in their life—the tremendous areas where they are morally soft and insecure before God and man.

Generally, a person who is living by the Law is intensely critical of others. They are doing that kind of criticism because they do not want to come to grips with their own inconsistencies, and it is easier to point a finger. It is also, I think, the case that a person who's trying to live by the Law will inevitably face deep times of depression and boredom. Because it is the function of the Law to point out that we have failed before God. And it's impossible for anyone who's trying seriously to attain a standard of righteousness by obedience to the Law to be satisfied with their performance. Inevitably, the boredom and depression must come in.

The solution is to get this first husband to the Cross, that he might be crucified with Christ.

Because Christ, in the nature of Adam, has fully kept the demands of the Law. If it is true “that soul that sinneth, it shall die,” it is also true that the soul that is perfect before God has the authority to grant life. So on the one hand, we who broke the Law deserve death. But He who kept the Law affirms in God's eyes the right to, therefore, give life because He has kept it. If it is true, “the soul that sins will die,” it must also be true that the soul that keeps the Law shall live.

And since Adam was a progenitor of death, and death passed to all of his seed, so also Christ—who kept the Law and who fulfilled it and became sin for us—has that same reproductive power as Adam, only in a different direction. Through Adam came death, but through Christ came life.

We have been married to a new husband. There is no future to the old husband at all.

What does it mean to be married to Christ? And this is a wonderful analogy that is given to us in the Scripture. We have to think for a moment (whether we're male or female) as the bride of Christ, if we are Christians. We are now Christ's “wife,” betrothed to Him—the marriage to be consummated in the wedding banquet in the age to come. But just as surely as Mary was

HAPPILY REMARRIED

Romans 7:1-6

betrothed to Joseph, without the marriage yet being consummated, she was regarded under the Law as being married. So also we are betrothed to Christ and regarded now as His bride. What does that mean for us? What does it mean for a bride now to be married to a husband?

We have been freed from the demands of the Law because it has been satisfied. It has no ability to act against the person who is dead. Our old nature is really dead. It's gone—vanished. And—as I indicated several weeks ago—if I'm speeding down the highway and I get a ticket for it, if I died before I appear in court, the law has no affect on me. It cannot resurrect me to appear before the judge. So the Law of God operates that way in us. If we truly have died, it has no power over us. We are dead to the Law. We are dead to sin. We are now married to Christ.

Several important deductions we can make from this.

I. Being married to Christ, we are given the name of the husband: Christ.

And in this earth, we have been known as Christians. There is no higher name in all of the world, in all of the universe, than the name of Christ. He has been given a name that every knee shall bow to in earth and in heaven. In the sea and under the sea. Angels and principalities and powers. Everything must become subject to that Name. That's incredible, because it shows what power there is in just being a Christian. There is nothing that can compare. No one could have ever landed a better husband than Christ. Think of what it is to be married to Christ, to have entrance into His family, to know His Father and our Father. To have the kind of access that that Name grants. We have been given a name. The name of Christ has been placed upon us.

II. Not only that, but as married to Christ, we share His standing before God.

Whatever position the husband has, we as His bride are able to enter into that position.

According to 1 Corinthians 1:30 God has made Christ to be our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, and our redemption. There is no flaw in Christ. He enjoys perfect standing with God the Father. And since we are married to Him, we are covered by that relationship, and we

HAPPILY REMARRIED

Romans 7:1-6

ourselves enjoy a perfect relationship of acceptance with God the Father. We are covered by the righteousness of Christ, our husband. We are, therefore, complete in Him. So it is true that we have His name. It is true that we have His standing.

III. It is also true that we have His privileges.

Wives are able to enjoy the privileges their husbands have. We have, for example, joint title to our property. All the privileges I have, my wife has because she is my wife. The analogy breaks down because she has had something to do with earning that. But I, in reference to being married to Christ, have no earning which I have piled up to allow me to share in the privileges which He enjoys. What are the privileges which He enjoys? He is seated at the right hand of God the Father. That is His privilege. He has the ability of access, innermost access, to the eternal God, the Spirit which rules the universe. I have that access, too, because I am, if you will, the “daughter-in-law” of God, having been married to Jesus Christ. If He is seated at the right hand of the majesty on high, I have that privilege also of being seated with Him in the heavenly places. Is He accepted as the beloved? Does the Father’s word come to Him, “Thou art My beloved, in whom I am well pleased”? Then also the Father’s Word comes to me from Ephesians 1 that I, as the bride of Christ, have been accepted into the beloved. Does He have angels sent as ministering spirits to strengthen Him? Then also the angels which are ours, whom Jesus says in Matthew 18, “always behold the face of their Father in heaven,” sent as ministering spirits to help us—so much of the time never seen by us, yet very real and present—and we have the privileges of the ministries of angels interceding on our behalf and ministering to us in ways that cannot be seen or figured.

I think there’s going to be a lot of incredible things that are seen in heaven that we didn’t see on earth. It’ll be sort of like one of these special photography sorts of things. When you turn on a particular light, all of a sudden colors are brought out that you couldn’t see under normal light.

HAPPILY REMARRIED

Romans 7:1-6

When the veil is wiped away and we see the spirit world as it truly exists, we are going to be astonished by the strength of the ministry of angels that we have been given as a privilege.

Is Christ going to reign on the earth? Is He going to reign through the heavens? Then also we have entered into that privilege of reigning and ruling with Him in the age to come. So we have His privileges.

IV. And we have His possessions.

Everything you see that He has, we have. All things are yours, Paul says. Life or death, whatever—everything is yours. Christ's is God's, and you are Christ's.

V. We have also His love if we are married to Him.

I would submit that no one is in a better position to know the love of the husband as does the wife. She knows that love in a way that no stranger, or even other family members, can know. She knows the tenderness, the uniqueness, the presentness of the love of the husband. And in Christ, we see the model of the perfect husband. So we, as the bride of Christ, see and know His love as no one else. We're specifically told in the Scripture that the Lord, as the husband of the Church, nourishes and cherishes His Bride. That's what His attitude is towards us.

VI. We also find that, being married to Him, we share in His purpose for us.

His purpose is that He might present us faultless before the presence of glory with exceeding joy. That He might present us without spot or without blemish. As Paul indicates here in the text today, that indeed we might have fruit. For we have been discharged from the Law, just like being discharged from the military, we have been discharged from the Law. While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the Law, worked in our members to bear fruit for death. But not so now in our life with God. Because in verse 4 we find that we might belong to Him so we might bear fruit to God.

HAPPILY REMARRIED

Romans 7:1-6

Remember the purpose for Adam and Eve when He put them in the Garden? “Be fruitful and replenish” (Genesis 1:28). Part of their relationship was not simply the enjoyment of each other, but it was productivity. So in our being married to the old nature, it was bearing fruit, and it was fruit for death. But in being married to Christ, new fruit is coming forth, and it is fruit for life. Paul makes this incredible statement, that in this bearing fruit—when we’re married to that old husband—that bearing fruit to death was aroused, or stimulated, by the Law.

There’s a fascinating application. If I were to tell you right now, “Do not swallow!” What did you do almost immediately? You took a gulp. You hadn’t been thinking about swallowing, but the law aroused you to swallow. The law itself was wholly just, blameless, and good. But you just did what I told you not to do. Because the law stimulates one’s thought life in respect to doing the wrong.

A beautiful illustration of this was given by Dr. Harry Ironside. Dr. Ironside, for many years, was pastor of the great Moody church in Chicago, Illinois. He tells this story about the contrast between the Law and grace and the Law stimulating us to sin, which I think is among my very favorite illustrations in all the world. He tells the story of a young Indian lad who had been on a Navajo reservation until Dr. Ironside brought him to Oakland. This young Indian had been a Christian for only about two years. When he came to Oakland, he was taken into a group of Christian young people one Sunday night, and they were discussing Law and grace. The young man listened to the college students as they argued back and forth about various aspects of Law and grace. Finally, the leader called on the young Indian man to say a few words. He said something like this: “I have been listening to you talk about Law and grace. The longer I listen, the more I think. The more I think you don’t know what Law or grace is. Let me tell you what I think. When Mr. Ironside asked me to go to Oakland with him, I got on a big train down on the reservation. We rode all day long. When we got to the desert, I was very tired. So I got off the

HAPPILY REMARRIED

Romans 7:1-6

train to walk the platform and my stretch legs. While I walked around the platform, I saw a sign that said, 'Do not spit here.' I looked at that sign and thought, 'What strange sign.' Before I knew what happened, I spat. I looked all around the platform and I saw that many people spat there. I thought, 'How strange the sign says, "Do not spit here," but many people spat, and I spat.' We got on the train again and came a long way up to Oakland. Some friends met us and took us to a beautiful home. Mr. Ironside took me in and showed me a soft chair and excused himself for a while. And I was left alone in the room. Everything was so nice and soft, with a thick rug on the floor. Beautiful. Everything was so nice. I walked around the room looking for a sign, 'Do not spit here' but I couldn't find one. I thought, 'Too bad this lovely room was already ruined by people spitting on the floor.' Then I looked around on the floor and saw nobody had been spitting there. Then it came to me, when the law says, 'Do not spit here,' it makes me want to spit. And I spit, and many people spit. But when I came into grace and everything was lovely and nice, I don't want to spit. And I do not need a law to say, 'Do not spit here.'"

We are married to Christ. Who wants to sin? We have truly been discharged from the Law, dead to that which held us captive. So we serve not under the old written code, but in the new life of the Spirit. That verse 6, "under the new life of the Spirit" is the important fulcrum by which Paul will drive home the rest of chapter 7 and chapter 8. Because in the rest of chapter 7, Paul is going to talk about the function of Law in the believer's life, and what Law simply does in the believer's life is what it did before the believer became a believer. It makes him conscious of his sin. It makes him aware of failure. It brings him into condemnation. But there is in the law of the Spirit no condemnation in Christ. We have been set free from the Law, and we have been made alive in the Spirit.

How does this function? It is the purpose of the Law to continue to bring us into condemnation, to bring us into failure. To say, "I have not kept the Law of God. I have sinned. I have failed."

HAPPILY REMARRIED

Romans 7:1-6

The Law can never commend us. It can only condemn us. If we are still relating to God on the basis of Law, then we can never really have the peace of being a Christian. Because every time, as a Christian, we do something wrong, we immediately come under condemnation. And we feel as though we have to redo the work of salvation and get right with God all over again, not realizing that we're in a position already of righteousness with God. The Law can only keep condemning.

But what does grace do? What does the new Spirit of life in Christ do? The Spirit of life in Christ does something the Law can never do. The Law can never give us the assurance. The Law must always keep us at a distance from God. Like at Sinai, at the foot of the mountain. They couldn't even touch the mountain. It quaked and it burned, and it was holy. But in Jesus Christ, we come close to God. So close that as Paul develops his theme in chapter 8, he says that the Spirit within us allows us to come to the Father and cry, "Abba," which means "Papa."

So what the Law could not do, the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has done. The Law makes us recognize we are guilty and condemned, but the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has caused us to recognize that because of Christ's work on the cross, we are fully accepted by Christ, fully His children. And the Spirit of life is witnessing for us all the time that we are the sons and the daughters of God. Married to Christ and joint heirs with Him of the kingdom which is coming.

Closing Prayer

We praise You, our Lord, for this Word which is directed our way today. We want to be exceedingly careful of our thoughts and of our doctrine because, as Paul, we want to exercise that care which never misrepresents You. We recognize our need for You today, that by means of the Law we were not justified. And even today as Christians, by keeping the Law we still are not justified. We are saved by grace. We are justified by Christ. We are sanctified in Christ. Having been given our position of righteousness, we do not now revert back to the Law by

HAPPILY REMARRIED

Romans 7:1-6

striving through works and obedience to the Law to keep our righteousness. But rather freely and willingly, we yield ourselves as slaves unto You and as a bride unto her husband that the Spirit of life which is in You dwells also in us—causing us not to be condemned, not to be depressed. Not to continually throw open our salvation as if it were a matter of doubt, or something which we “gain one and lost another,” but that salvation which is from You, working in us as we manifest in our lives the fruit of righteousness, which is the sure sign that we have been placed in You. The change indeed has come, and we who once served the letter of the Law and tried to keep it and failed, have now been set free to serve You in Spirit and in truth. You told us that that would happen. You said the day was coming when those who worshipped the Father would worship Him in Spirit and in truth. You’ve brought us to that moment today. I pray, Lord Jesus, for those who are struggling with the area of Law in their lives, that we will gain through this chapter 7 in Romans the insight of what the Law is there for—there to convict us, there to remind us of our failure. But not through obedience to it, to assure us of our salvation and our relationship with You. For that is the task of Your blessed Son, through whom the Spirit bears witness in our hearts that we are the children of God. We thank You today for the marvel of the witness in the Word which opens to us a doorway to life. In Christ’s Name, we give thanks and pray. Amen.