



When in Romans Do as the Righteous Do

"Life After Dead Husband"

Romans 7:1-4

It helps to arrive at your destination if you have some idea where you are going!

Let me show you where we're going in chapter seven. Look at verses eighteen through twenty-four:

Romans 7:18 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.

Romans 7:19 For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.

Romans 7:20 Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

Romans 7:21 I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.

Romans 7:22 For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.

Romans 7:23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

Romans 7:24 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

We'll comment on these in a future study. For now we must decide what Paul was describing. More to the point, we need to decide **when** was Paul describing. What time in his life was he referring to? Was this his current and on-going experience? Or was he referring back to his experience before he was saved?

In other words, is this a struggle I will have as a Christian?

- Some look at this struggle with sin and believe that it must have been before Paul was born again.

- Others believe that he was a Christian involved in the ongoing struggle against the flesh.

I think it's both! This is the struggle of *anyone* who tries to obey God in their own strength by keeping a set of rules.

This is something that a Christian may do, but something that a non-Christian can only do.

Griffith Thomas said, "The one point of the passage is that it describes a man who is trying to be good and holy by his own efforts and is beaten back every time by the power of indwelling sin; it thus refers to anyone, regenerate or unregenerate."

The point of the passage, and of our chapter, is that we should not seek to live by keeping the Law of Moses or any other law or rules or regulations or rites or rituals but by yielding to the indwelling power of God the Holy Spirit. Any law emphasizes my human effort to be holy. No amount of my human effort can sustain a victorious, fruitful Christian life.

Too many Christians put themselves under some law, some rules, and then struggle unsuccessfully to grow when God wants us to abide in a personal relationship with Him that will bear spiritual fruit.

I can illustrate this by pointing to the Pharisees. They approached life by trying to keep the Law of God. They were considered the super-spiritual elite among the Jews.

Jesus, however, had issues with them. He pointed out repeatedly that their keeping of the Law was all outward, all external, having no real effect on their hearts. As such they were, He said, like a freshly painted tomb. They looked great but inside they were rotting away.

Even though Jesus was clear that keeping the Law was not the way to walk with Him, in the Book of Acts you see that many of the Jews still tried to put the saved Gentiles under the Law, demanding they be circumcised and keep the Sabbath and in other ways conform to the rules of Judaism.

No one is to try to live the Christian life by keeping the Law. Not Jews. Certainly not Gentiles.

That being the case, it's natural to ask, "What **is** our relationship to the Law?"

Paul is going to tell us we are dead with regard to it.

Romans 7:1 Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives?

I'm told that in the Greek texts the word "the" is not there in front of "law." Paul was referring to the Law of Moses but broadening the concept to include all law, *any* law, as a way of approaching my daily walk.

That's important for us because a lot of Christian groups come along and pick out certain parts of the Law as still being binding upon us. They say in order to be a Christian you *must* keep certain laws, that you *must* do certain things. If you're not careful you can be persuaded by them to adopt a certain outward lifestyle and begin thinking you're on the spiritual track when in fact you might just be painting the exterior of your life while inwardly you're rotting away.

It's a given that laws are only binding upon you while you are alive. Once you've died, the law can't demand anything of you. Paul is going to argue that you are dead with regard to the Law and all such laws. He does it by giving you a specific illustration.

Romans 7:2 For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband.

Paul used marriage as an illustration. The death of her husband freed a woman from her marriage and she was then free to marry another man.

Romans 7:3 So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man.

Among the Jews a husband could divorce his wife but a wife could never divorce her husband. A woman who divorced her husband to marry another man was considered to be committing adultery.

This was all basic stuff to the Jews. If you were married you were subject to the prevailing laws. In the case of wives, if their husband died they were free from the law that would make them adulteresses if they entered a new relationship.

Romans 7:4 Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another - to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God.

Just as death breaks the marriage relationship, so your death with Jesus Christ breaks your relationship to the Law of Moses and law in general as a way of life.

The argument that gets raised is that if you are free from keeping the Law and all law you will be lawless, i.e., you will be free to commit all kinds of sin.

Think of the illustration of marriage Paul used. The wife set free by the death of her husband. Was she then free to become promiscuous or a prostitute or worse? No, she was free to remarry another.

One 'marriage' was broken by death and a new 'marriage' is entered in to. The Christian is now married to another – to Him who was raised from the dead. It is in this new, living, vibrant, dynamic personal relationship to Jesus Christ that we derive power to live and grow and have victory over sin.

We are not dead to law so we can live as we please. We are free from law to live as the bride of Jesus Christ. As His bride we should bear fruit to God.

(This fruit-bearing is taken up in the next set of verses).

Applying this, Jon Courson wrote:

There is no reason to be preoccupied with your failings, your lack of prayer, your lack of love, your lack of anything. There is no reason to try to live up to the rules, regulations, and expectations you've put upon yourself. When you realize that you died with Christ positionally on Calvary, you're free from the demands of the law and free instead to just love the Lord.

Francis Chan, in his book *Crazy Love*, wrote this:

Most Christians have been taught... to set aside a daily time for prayer and [Bible] reading. It's what we are supposed to do, and so for a long time it's what I valiantly attempted. When I didn't, I felt guilty.

Over time I realized that when we love God, we naturally run to Him - frequently and jealously. Jesus didn't command that we have a regular time with Him each day. Rather, He tells us to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." He called this the "first and greatest commandment" (Matthew 22:37-38). The results are intimate prayer and study of His Word. Our motivation changes from guilt to love.

I gotta tell you, while I agree with Chan, it's really hard to say what he said. I mean, it's Christian bedrock to encourage daily devotions. Anything that sounds remotely negative with regards to daily devotions can get you killed as a pastor. Or at least totally misunderstood!

Maybe I'd better quote another completely trusted source. Pastor Chuck Smith has been saying stuff like this for his entire ministry. In *Why Grace Changes Everything* he wrote,

How beautiful it is to experience the freedom and joy of a love relationship with God! Yet how sad it is that there are so many who insist on relating to God in a legalistic way. Their righteousness is based on what they can do for the Lord instead of on what He has already done for them. They carry around a huge list of "do's and don'ts" to keep them bound to God.

The Bible tells us that love is the fulfillment of the law. In fact, when asked which was the greatest commandment, Jesus replied that it was to love the Lord with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourself. Love, not the law, is the key to our relationship with God and with one another. God wants us to experience

the beauty of being drawn to Him by a cord far stronger than the obligation and guilt of the law.

Later Pastor Chuck mentions devotions along with other things that can become law-oriented rather than love-led.

We must stand fast in the liberty wherein Christ has made us free. We must not allow condemning rules to come in and dominate our lives until we feel that, unless we are praying seven hours a day or reading 25 chapters of Scripture in our devotions, we are not really righteous.

Remember what I said earlier. The wife is not set free from her dead husband in order to become promiscuous or a prostitute. She is set free to marry another. In our case it's Jesus!

We need to go beyond 'devotions' to *being* devotional.