

**“Not Under Law”**  
**Romans 7:1-6**  
**January 29, 2023**

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**INTRODUCTION:**

Paul had written in 6:14 that the Christian is no longer under law, but now under grace. In the rest of chapter 6 he addresses the potential misunderstanding of that statement, that it means a person can sin freely. He rejects the idea completely. But what does it actually mean that a person is not under law but under grace? That is the question Paul answers in this chapter and the first part of the next.

The word “law” or its equivalents is mentioned in every one of the first 14 verses of this chapter and thirty-five times from 7:1 to 8:4. It was important for Paul to clarify his view of the law because he wrote about it in a way that could easily be misconstrued. Most of his statements concerning the law were negative. He had reached a conclusion back in chapter 3 where he said, **“For by the works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight”** (3:20). Now, both in chapter 6 and in our current passage, he goes further to say not only is the law inadequate for our justification; it is also incapable of producing our sanctification. He goes further still and says that not only is the law powerless to make us good, it actually makes us worse. He had said back in chapter five that **“the law came in to increase the trespass”** (5:20). And he writes in verse 5 of our passage that **“our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death”** (7:5). It is no wonder then that Paul was commonly and falsely accused of teaching people to “forsake Moses” (Acts 21:21). While statements such as the assertion that the Christian is no longer under law could be misconstrued in that way, Paul’s teaching was more nuanced than that. Romans seven unpacks some of that nuance and helps us answer the question regarding the place of the law of God in our lives. Before we get into the details on this, let me summarize Paul’s teaching about the law like this. He believed that the law was good and perfect, but that it was incapable of making us good. The problem, Paul claimed, was not with any deficiency within the law but with a deficiency within us. Because of this, the law is more likely to provoke sin than to remedy it. Let’s explore this further through these first 6 verses of chapter 7.

**I. The Analogy – v. 1-3**

Paul’s principal assertion is that we are no longer under the jurisdiction of the law. The follower of Christ has been released from the law, just as much as none of us are under the jurisdiction of Russian law. They’re having a war there, and Russia has ordered the forced drafting of several hundred-thousand

conscripts. None of our young men will ever be drafted to fight in the Russian army because none of them are under the jurisdiction of Russian law. Paul uses a different analogy to explain his statement that we are no longer under the law, the analogy of marriage.

Two women do almost identical things by ending a marriage with a first husband and marrying a second. One is considered an adulteress and the other not. The critical difference is that the marriage of the one not guilty of adultery ended because of the death of her first husband. That death released her completely from her marital obligations to that husband. The permanent but limited duration of marriage is expressed in the wedding vows that are most often used. The marital vows I typically use require a spouse to promise to be a loving and faithful spouse, “as long as we both shall live.” Marriage is permanent in this life but with a permanence contingent upon the continuing life of both spouses. So the death of either spouse terminates the marriage and releases the living spouse from any continuing marital obligation to that spouse.

Though Paul doesn't state it in these initial verses, he states later in our passage that this marriage to the law is a bad marriage. It yields “fruit for death.” How is being under the law like a bad marriage? There are a couple of verses in Proverbs that describe such a bad marriage. Proverbs 25:24 says **“It is better to live in a corner of the housetop than in a house shared with a quarrelsome wife.”** The word for “quarrelsome” has the idea of contentious or nagging. Some translations even choose the word “nagging” to translate this. Proverbs 27:15 adds, **“A continual dripping on a rainy day and a quarrelsome wife are alike.”** Proverbs is written as the counsel of a father to his son, so the wording is from that perspective. The same could be true of a woman married to a nagging husband. The idea is of a spouse constantly reminding you that you don't measure up. There is a constant flow of criticism and judgment that sends the clear message that you are not good enough. Under such a constant onslaught, life would be improved by moving your bed to an unheated attic.

Isn't this the same thing the law does? By reminding us what we should be, the constant message is that we fall short. I'm not good enough. I don't have what it takes. There is something wrong with me. And then it's a short trip to the life-sapping conclusion, “I'm invisible and I don't matter.” And like a person feels trapped who is in such a bad marriage, one feels trapped when living under the law. The good news of this analogy is that the bad marriage is put permanently in the rear-view mirror. We are free from it and no longer under its jurisdiction. The shame that it brought can now be overcome.

## **II. The Reality – v. 4a**

An analogy is intended to illustrate and illuminate a truth, and the truth Paul's analogy of marriage illuminates is stated in verse 4. **“Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead.”** The bad marriage has ended through a death, and now a new one can be entered. Both events have been made possible because of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Through the death of Jesus, we are no longer married to the law that brings condemnation and shame. The sacrificial death of Jesus has satisfied the law's demands. The central reality is no longer, “I'm not good enough” because our standing now is based on Jesus' righteousness, and Jesus is good enough.

A bad marriage has ended and a new one established. We now “belong to another,” and the other is Jesus. Instead of a spouse who tells us all day and every day, “You don't measure up, you don't have what it takes, you're a fraud,” our new spouse speaks a different message. “I love you, and I rejoice over you with singing” (Zeph. 3:17). “Nothing will be able to separate you from my love” (Rom. 8:35).

In our Community Group Leaders meeting this past week, we looked at a curious passage from Genesis 2. **“And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed”** (2:25). The thing I find curious about this passage is the mention of being unashamed. It is the only mention of Adam and Eve's emotional life before the fall. Why not say, “they were naked and happy?” Why not any number of other emotional qualities such as contentment, fulfillment or joy? But only one feature of their emotional life appears, and it is that they were unashamed. This feature is mentioned because it shows that we were not built for shame. It is alien to God's design for us. It has intruded because of our fallen condition, and it continues to wreak havoc on our lives. In the death and resurrection of Jesus, God has undertaken to restore our fallen race to its pre-fall condition of being naked and unashamed. We can be completely honest with no fear of condemnation.

You will only grow in personal holiness on this foundation of the death and resurrection of Jesus, a foundation which releases you from shame and establishes your heart in its confidence in God's love. Richard Lovelace made this point in a book he wrote back in 1979 called *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*.

Christians who are no longer sure that God loves and accepts them in Jesus, apart from their present spiritual achievements, are subconsciously radically insecure persons—much less secure than non-Christians, because they have too much light to rest easily under the constant bulletins they receive from their Christian environment about the holiness of God and the righteousness they are supposed to have. Their insecurity shows itself in pride, a fierce defensive assertion of their own righteousness and defensive criticism of others. (p. 211-12)

### III. The Result – v. 4b-6

These final verses of our text show that Paul is not at all unconcerned about obedience to God's law. He could not be more serious about it, as indicated by the last phrase of verse 4. The death and resurrection of Jesus makes it possible for us to **“bear fruit for God.”** Paul names this fruit elsewhere, including such things as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and self-control. Obedience to God can only come on a foundation of grace, not law. His insistence that we are not under law but under grace stems not because he is against God's law, but rather because he is for it. To say that we are not under law but under grace should not be taken to mean that Paul is opposed to rules. He often gives rules for the churches, and any responsible parent has learned that good rules enforced consistently and lovingly lead to happy children. But the foundation for rules that help rather than hurt is the grace of God.

Let's think for a bit about this word “fruit.” It is used twice in our text, once to speak of “fruit for God” (v. 4) and a second time as “fruit for death” (v. 5). Fruit production is both mysterious and lengthy. It is mysterious in the fact that the early stages of a particular fruit look nothing like the fully matured fruit. A peach blossom looks nothing like a peach, and the same is the case for all fruit that I'm aware of. Similarly, the fruit for God in its early stages looks like resting in God's grace instead of setting yourself an aggressive “to-do” list on how you're going to serve God. Achieving things for God looks early on like receiving from God all that he has for us in Christ.

The same is the case with fruit for death. It doesn't look early on like the simple decision to indulge in some pornography could possibly bring any harm. But as time passes and the fruit matures, marriages are destroyed, relationships become unhealthy, and, if left unchecked, death results. Strikingly, Paul says that this progression starts with our sinful passions but then is made worse by the law. If your idea of the Christian life is simply that you need more self-discipline so you can just do what you're supposed to do, you are on the wrong path. What you need is a greater grasp of the grace of God and what he's done for you.

The other thing that is true of fruit, whether the literal kind or the metaphorical fruit of the Spirit, is that it takes time for it to mature. So patience is required, both for ourselves and for others. We live in a culture that trains us to expect instant gratification. If you make the right keystrokes and mouse clicks, then anything you might want is instantly available. But the valuable and lovely fruit God wants to give us takes time. And the soil in which it grows is the soil of God's grace, not the soil of law.

This becomes clearer in our final verse, which contrasts two ways. There is the new way of the Spirit and the old way of the written code. We have been released from the old way, **“having died to that which held us captive.”** And then notice that our release from the old way frees us up to **“serve in the new way of the Spirit.”** Paul is contrasting two ages here. The old age is dominated by the law and the new age by the Spirit. He is undoubtedly calling to mind that new covenant promise from Jeremiah 31. **“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt”** (31:31-32). This is an obvious reference to the Mosaic law, which Paul has announced that we are no longer under. Jeremiah goes on to say, **“But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts”** (31:33). This is the new way of the Spirit.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Let me close with a practical question. In light of Paul’s statement that we not under law but under grace, how should we read the law of God? The Bible is filled with commands. Do we just skip those parts? I read this week someone who said, “People today want a God to hold our hand but not tell us how to live.” Is that what Paul is saying? No, but he is inviting us to approach God’s law differently. What does that look like? It looks like reading God’s law as promise. If God promises to write his law on our hearts, that means that by the power of God’s Spirit, he is working in our lives even now to bring that about. Instead of reading it as shame-producing law, by the power of the Spirit we can read it as promise. So when God says, “Forgive one another,” he promises to send his Spirit to help us actually do that. Reading God’s promises now becomes like, at least for me, perusing a Rapha website with the assurance that everything there is mine. Rapha is the manufacturer of my favorite bicycle clothing, most of it beyond my willingness to pay. Similarly, by the grace of God, when we read his commands the appropriate first response is to give thanks that this too is a gift God has promised to give to us.

This is true freedom, and it is very different from the definition of freedom offered by our culture. The wrong view of freedom is the absence of restrictions, while the biblical view is the embracing of the right restrictions. Note that our text here says that we now **“serve in the new way of the Spirit.”** Because we are not under law but under grace, we obey in a way that brings true freedom.

**Discussion Questions**  
**Romans 7:1-6**

1. This passage explains Paul's earlier assertion that Christians are not under law but under grace (6:14). What do you understand him to mean by that? What do you understand him not to mean?
2. If we are not under law but under grace, what is the role of rules (in parenting or any other association)?
3. To read the law without grace produces an attitude of "I'm not good enough, I don't measure up," etc. What harm comes from such attitudes?
4. Give some thought to Genesis 2:25 – "And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed." Why is the lack of shame the only feature mentioned of Adam and Eve's pre-fall emotional life?
5. Our passage mentions bearing fruit for God (v. 4) and bearing fruit for death (v. 5). What do you think is meant by fruit for God?
6. One feature of fruit is that it doesn't look at all at the beginning as it looks as fully mature. Can you think of examples of that in both kinds of fruit (fruit for God and for death)?
7. The development of fruit into its mature version also takes time. Can you think of some fruit God has given to you over the years, some fruit that has taken time?
8. What are some implications and applications of verse 6, which teaches that we now serve in the new way of the Spirit and not the old way of the written code?