

Not Ashamed
(Week 17)
Romans 7:1-13
“A Wedding and a Funeral”

Introduction

There are two things that Paul strongly preaches against in the book of *Romans*. One is **License**, and the other is **Legalism**. In regard to the first, Paul strongly condemns those who say that his message of grace offers a license to sin (***Romans 6***). And, in ***Chapter 7***, he addresses the idea of “legalism”, which is the belief that we can win God’s favor by simply obeying The Law (or Commandments). Neither of these attitudes are to accompany genuine salvation. For we know, to be saved IS to be obedient to the Savior, and we also know that in our own human frailty, it is impossible for us to do so. Seems like a catch 22 doesn’t it? Well that, my friends, is where the Holy Spirit of God comes in! To be in Christ is to be led by His Spirit and not our own. And that makes all the difference in the world!

In Paul’s letters to the Corinthian Church (***1 and 2 Corinthians***), we see a church given over to licentiousness. And in the book of *Galatians*, we see a church being corrupted by legalism. Both are destroyers of the faith. One leads believers into sin, while the other leads believers to think they are sinless. Both viewpoints are extremely dangerous.

In ***Romans Chapter 7***, Paul uses the illustration of marriage and death to teach us that our relationship with the old nature is dead, and we have entered into a new union with Christ. Therefore, it is not by the standards of The Law that we have been accepted, but By His love and grace. In short, trying to make ourselves acceptable to God by observing His commandments was never intended to save. The Law wasn’t given so that we could demonstrate how good we could be, but rather, The Law was given to demonstrate how good we **can not** be. It was given to show us our desperate need for a Savior.

When we hear the word “legalism”, we often think of the Pharisees, those religious zealots in Jesus’ day who were constantly accusing Him of not “Keeping with The Law of Moses”. When He healed a man’s withered hand on the Sabbath, they were furious (***Mark 3:1-6***), but He healed him anyway. I’m glad that Christ values people above The Law, or we would never have found our own healing! Can you imagine being so self-righteous that you thought you were better at keeping the rules of your religion than the very God Who gave those rules in the first place? That, my friends, is arrogance pushed to its very limits.

But sadly, it’s not just those Pharisees, who had this deluded sense of superiority, it is also extremely present within churches as well. All of us know someone like this. A person who truly believes that they are so good at obeying God’s commands that everyone else around them is inferior. I have had to deal with people like this throughout my whole tenure as a minister. Can I tell you the truth? I would much rather hang out with a bunch of lost people, who know they are sinners, than with a bunch of self-righteous people who think they are not. Can I get a witness? Legalism destroys churches, plain and simple. There is nothing that I can think of that will tear a church apart quicker than its membership forgetting that they are sinners saved by grace, and grace alone. There can be no spreading of the gospel without the humility that brings us to our knees to accept Christ in the first place. It is not our goodness that saves us but the goodness (grace) of Christ.

“So, whoever thinks he stands must be careful not to fall.”

1 Corinthians 10:12

So, how do we avoid legalism in our churches? By keeping in mind that our goodness has never been, and never will be, good enough. We have been saved by grace, through faith... period. The Christian has the blessed assurance of knowing that he will no longer be judged according to The Law, but instead, will be judged based upon the righteousness of Christ Jesus. The Law condemns, but Jesus saves! Therefore, we have nothing to fear. Where we were once “married” to our old sin natures and condemned by The Law, we are now “married” to Christ Jesus and are accepted and loved as His very own bride. What a wondrous distinction. Old things are passed away, and all things have become new (**2 Corinthians 5:17**). Let us look today at the difference between our two “spouses” as it were. The marriage to the flesh, and the marriage to Christ Jesus our LORD.

Married to The Flesh

“Since I am speaking to those who know The Law, brothers and sisters, don’t you know that the law rules over someone as long as he lives? For example, a married woman is legally bound to her husband while he lives. But if her husband dies, she is released from the law regarding the husband. So then, if she is married to another man while her husband is living, she will be called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law. Then if she is married to another man, she is not an adulteress.”
Romans 7:1-3

Quite a few years back, I found myself in the precarious position of trying to counsel a married couple, who were on the brink of divorce. As a Pastor, I have done this sort of thing many times before, but I will never quite forget the “uniqueness” of this particular instance. And I will never forget how sorry I felt for the poor woman. You see, her husband really and truly believed in his heart that he was pretty much perfect. And she, no matter how hard she tried, just could not live up to his standards. He was constantly making her feel worthless.

I remember one instance in particular when he said to her, that when she failed to get the dishes done by a particular time (arbitrarily set by him of course), that it was proof that she was being disrespectful to him. Really? Now, I can usually keep a pretty good “poker face” when listening to people share, but that one made me roll my eyes. What an impossible standard to live up to. The poor woman was so depressed and defeated that she wanted to die. And there I sat, powerless to do anything to help. Because the standards set by her husband were simply unattainable, period. After weeks of talking with her, I realized that the marriage was destined to fail, with one party being immovable and the other in total defeat.

My friends, that is exactly what it was like for us, when we were married to our flesh and judged according to the standards of The Law. Try as we may, we can never measure up, and The Law (unlike that woman’s husband) really is perfect. The problem for us is not The Law, the problem for us... IS US. To be without Christ is to be measured upon the scales of The Law of God and found wanting. There is absolutely nothing that we can do about it.

But one thing about The Law, or any law for that matter, when you die, there is no more law. The laws (all laws) are only enforceable against the living. When you die, the law no longer applies. After all, have you ever seen the police pull over a hearse and give the guy in the casket a speeding ticket? Of course not! He is beyond the reach of the long arm of the law as it were. He is dead to it.

This is exactly what happens when we surrender ourselves to Christ and are baptized in Him. We are dead to the law. Our old marriage to the flesh is over, and we are IN Christ,

resurrected to marry again! And our new Groom loves us and will protect us from any type of Judgment. Talk about marrying up! But, more on our “new marriage” later. Let’s talk a bit more about about our “ex”.

“What should we say then? Is The Law sin? Absolutely not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin if it were not for The Law. For example, I would not have known what it is to covet if The Law had not said, Do not covet. And sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind. For apart from The Law sin is dead. Once I was alive apart from The Law, but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life again and I died. The commandment that was meant for life resulted in death for me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and through it killed me. So then, The Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good. Therefore, did what is good become death to me? Absolutely not! On the contrary, sin, in order to be recognized as sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that through the commandment, sin might become sinful beyond measure.”

Romans 7:7-13

In essence, what Paul is saying here, is it is not The Law’s fault that we fail. The fault lies with us, and us alone. The Law merely points out the flaws already within us. As stated previously, The Law was never intended to save, but rather, it was given to show us that we need saving. We are born into sin, needing a Savior, and it is the responsibility of The Law to point us to Jesus. That is why every preacher worth his salt will begin by preaching about sin, before pointing to the cure. We must first realize that we are hopeless sinners, before we can ever see the need for a Savior.

I love it that Paul uses the sin of “coveting” for his example of becoming aware of the sinfulness within himself. I believe this is no accident, and that The Holy Spirit wants to show us something here. You see, all of the other commandments speak of actions. They command us to Love God and love our neighbors as ourself. But “Thou shall not covet”; that is a completely different kind of command. That one isn’t about something that we do, it is about something that we feel on the inside. Coveting reveals an issue of the heart. Do you realize that you can obey the rules and still not obey for the right reason?

I remember when the “seatbelt” laws were first passed in our state. At first I refused to obey them, because I wasn’t particularly “thrilled” about having “the man” tell me what to do. It wasn’t long after that, I received a ticket for not wearing my seatbelt. From that moment, I always wore one, but not because I wanted to, but because I didn’t want another ticket. In my heart, I was still very much “unbuckled”. I obeyed the letter of the law, but the spirit of it was still very much being broken in my heart. Now don’t write me letters, I have since repented of this attitude and am happy to buckle my seat belt now. Attitudes change as we get older and realize that we are not invincible! But I digress.

Now, back to coveting... when Paul realized that he was covetous, he recognized that no matter how hard he tried to obey the laws of God, he still had a “heart condition”. For no matter how hard we try to control our actions, we have little control over the sinfulness of our hearts. It’s certainly not The Law’s fault, it is our own. The Law merely exposes us for what we are. We are sinners by nature, and as such, have within us the desire to sin. And the wages of this sinful nature... is death (**Romans 6:23**).

Have you ever seen a sign that reads “wet paint, do not touch”? I promise you that if you look closely at the object that has been freshly painted you will find fingerprints. Do you know why? Because sinners long to break the rules. We cannot help ourselves. It's just who we are. This is the very nature of every lost person in this world, and the only thing that can separate us from that sin nature is death. But thanks to God, through our salvation found in Christ, we (that is our old sinful natures) have been crucified with Christ and have been resurrected to newness of life. We have been freed from the old ways that once controlled us. That old “marriage” has ended, and a new one has begun.

Married To Christ

“Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you also were put to death in relation to The Law through the body of Christ so that you may belong to another. You belong to Him Who was raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God. For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions aroused through The Law were working in us to bear fruit for death. But now we have been released from The Law, since we have died to what held us, so that we may serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the old letter of the Law.”

Romans 7:4-6

I was wondering how many of you noticed that I had skipped over these verses before! Now, I want to go back and pick them up. You see, those of us who are in Christ were crucified with Him, when He died upon the cross. And we have been raised to new life in Him, because of His resurrection! It wasn't The Law that died, so that we could be free... it was us. We died, so that we can never again be judged according to The Law. But according to Paul, we have been raised again, so that we can “serve in newness of life”. So does that mean that we no longer have to obey God's commands? Of course it doesn't. What it means is that now that we are married to Christ, we obey God's law from a changed heart and not just because we have been commanded to so. Our natures have been crucified, so that we live to obey, rather than long to disobey!

You see, being in Christ neither gives us license to sin, nor does it give us an excuse to be legalistic. What we do have is a new nature, and a new “husband”, who will teach us how to obey. Have you ever wondered why, in regards to marriage, that God has commanded that the husband be the head of the household, and that the wife be submissive to her husband (**1 Peter 3:1-7**)? It is because marriage is designed to be a picture of Christ and His Church. As we, the bride, submit to Him, He guides us in the way that we should go. We no longer follow the rules because we “ought to”. We now follow, because we are in love with Christ, our LORD, the “head of our household”, and He loves us as His bride.

Let me give you an example, if I may. Our country, over the past hundred years, has been involved in several foreign wars. Many of the soldiers that we sent abroad have returned to the states with foreign brides. Those brides have become citizens of this country simply by being married to those soldiers. They didn't obtain their citizenship by any other means, other than they fell in love and married an American. Now who do you think in those marriages teaches all those new brides how to speak our language and obey our customs and our laws? Their husbands of course. It is the same with us when we receive Christ. He loves us and teaches us how to become good citizens in the kingdom of heaven. We obey His leading, because we are in love with Him and He with us. This is a far better way to compel our obedience to The Law of God, rather than our futile attempts to obey only because we have

been commanded to do so. The very same commands that our hearts used to war against, we now cherish. We don't obey in order to be accepted. We obey BECAUSE we have already been accepted! The old marriage was caused us to cringe in the fear of unworthiness, but the new marriage is one of forgiveness, love, and holiness. We are being remade in the image of Christ, and He loves us all the way through the process. When you turn to Jesus, you can count on His acceptance. Not because you have earned it, but because He has paid for the privilege.

“‘I Am the bread of life’, Jesus told them. ‘No one who comes to Me will ever be hungry, and no one who believes in Me will ever be thirsty again. But as I told you, you’ve seen Me, and yet you do not believe. Everyone The Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will never cast out.’” **John 6:35-37**

That is neither license, nor legalism, what it is... is love. And love means acceptance. And that is what is in store for those who will stand in the presence of The Law and be convicted of their sin and turn to Christ for forgiveness as a result. The old life that was married to the flesh is over, and a new one in Christ has begun. This can only be done, by the leading of The Holy Spirit, and the work within us that begins after that, can only be completed by that same Spirit. There is nothing that we have that we can boast about, except for Jesus. Our Savior, our Groom, and our LORD.

So let all of God's people say... **TRUTH!!!**