

**Married to Another:**  
A Series of 11 Sermons on Paul's View of the Law  
Preached by Lee Irons in 2002

**Sermon 1:**  
**Introduction to Paul's View of the Law**  
1-20-02

Historic Protestant theology has taken the position that the Law and the Gospel are opposed to one another. The Law demands perfect obedience, and threatens a curse if we fail in one iota. The Gospel, by contrast, does not give us commands that we must keep, but offers us the perfect, substitutionary Law-keeping of Jesus Christ. Only Christ's righteousness avails as an acceptable righteousness before God. This righteousness can only be received as a gift, by faith alone, apart from our inadequate attempts to keep the Law. The Law says, "Do this and live!" The Gospel says, "Jesus has done it, receive what he has done by faith, and you will live." Both Lutheran and Reformed theologians agree on this Law-Gospel contrast. It is an essential element of historic, confessional Protestant theology. Not only is it the historic Protestant view, but most importantly, the Law-Gospel contrast is rooted in the teaching of the Apostle Paul.

However, in the last 25 years, an influential group of scholars have begun to rethink this classical Protestant view. They argue that the Law-Gospel contrast is based on a misreading of Paul. These scholars hold to what is called "the new perspective" on Paul and the Law.<sup>1</sup> According to this new perspective, Paul's view of the Law is fundamentally positive not negative. The Law is God's gracious provision for man. Its basic demand is that we have faith, an obedient trust in God. What about Paul's negative statements, like, "As many as are of the Law are under a curse"? Or those passages where Paul says that the believer is "not under the Law but under grace"? These passages are interpreted by this group of scholars in a variety of ways, but in the final analysis "the new perspective" claims that in these passages Paul is condemning a misuse of the Law. He isn't against the Law itself. When properly interpreted and applied, the Law promotes a non-legalistic obedience that flows from faith. According to this view, the Law and the gospel are not opposed to each other. The Law itself proclaims the gospel, and is an integral part of our obedient response of faith to the gospel.

But recently there is a growing number of scholars who have major objections to the new perspective. The primary scholars in this camp are conservative New Testament scholars who are working within the classical Protestant categories, but who are exegetes first and foremost. I'd like to mention three scholars in particular, since they have been of tremendous benefit to me in my own study ...

Stephen Westerholm – a Lutheran scholar who teaches biblical studies at McMaster University in Ontario, Canada. He has written *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith* (recently revised and expanded: *Perspectives Old and New on Paul*). I highly recommend Westerholm's book for its valuable survey of the history of Pauline interpretation in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His critique of the new perspective is right on target.

Douglas Moo – Moo was formerly Professor of NT at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, but he recently moved to Wheaton Graduate School. Moo contributed to a Zondervan Counterpoint book titled, *The Law, the Gospel, and the Modern Christian*, which features five evangelical views on the Law: two Reformed views, a dispensational view, Walter Kaiser's view, and then Moo's view. Having read this book several times, I find Moo's contribution to be the closest to my own. My only real difference with Moo is with his view of the Sabbath. This book is helpful because of the exchange of views, as well as the critiques of each view by the other four authors. I highly recommend this book.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The primary scholars in this group are E. P. Sanders, James D. G. Dunn, and N. T. Wright.

<sup>2</sup> Douglas Moo's work on the Law includes: "'Law,' 'Works of the Law,' and Legalism in Paul," *WTJ* 45 (1983) 73-100; "Jesus and the Authority of the Mosaic Law," *JSNT* 20 (1984) 3-49; "Paul and the Law in the Last Ten Years," *SJT* 40 (1987) 287-307; "The Law of Moses or the Law of Christ," pp. 203-18 in J. S. Feinberg, ed.,

T. David Gordon – he formerly taught at Gordon Conwell, but currently he teaches at Grove City College. Gordon’s views can be found in several journal articles, as well some lectures he delivered at Westminster in Philadelphia in 1996. You can buy the tapes from Westminster Media. As an ordained minister in the PCA, Professor Gordon is closer to us theologically than the other two scholars, although Moo is quite sympathetic to Reformed theology. Gordon also has the advantage of having studied under Professor Meredith Kline and being a colleague of his at Gordon Conwell for many years. The influence of Kline’s covenant theology is crucial and adds some important points of clarification to undergird and strengthen the contributions of Westerholm and Moo.

What are these scholars saying about the new perspective on Paul? To begin with, these scholars join in condemning the new perspective as a departure from the historic Law-Gospel contrast that stands at the heart of the gospel as recovered by the Reformation, by Luther and Calvin. To water down or soften the contrast between the Law and the Gospel has disastrous consequences. When the Law is interpreted in a gracious manner as harmonious with the Gospel, it inevitably distorts our understanding of the Gospel. For if the demands of the Law are conceived of as the fundamentally gracious demands of the Gospel, then the Gospel is not the good news that we are justified by faith alone apart from works, but the not-so-good news that we are justified by our attempts to keep the Law.

I am convinced that these critics of the new perspective are right on in their assessment. But what is interesting is that they are engaging the new perspective not merely as defenders of traditional orthodoxy. As exegetes whose highest allegiance is to the inspired text, these scholars also believe that some aspects of the Reformation tradition need to be reformed in light of the text. To be sure, they are convinced that the Reformation got the gospel right, and they want to remain faithful to that gospel of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, on account of Christ alone.

Nevertheless, they defend that Pauline gospel of grace not only by appealing to the Lutheran or Reformed confessions, but by going back to the epistles of Paul to engage the text afresh in light of these new concerns. The end result is that the Reformers were both right and wrong.

On the one hand, they were right to pick up on the Law-Gospel contrast in Paul’s theology. The Law is not based on faith. The Law says, “The one who *does* these things will live by them.” Therefore, justification is not by obedience to the (allegedly) gracious provisions of the Law, but by faith alone apart from the works of the Law.

On the other hand, Luther and many of the Reformers influenced by him were wrong, because they started out with an abstract definition of the Law. For example, Moo, like Luther sees the Law-Gospel contrast as central to Paul’s thought. He wants to maintain the Reformational insight on the antithesis of Law and Gospel. But unlike Luther, Moo does not see Law and Gospel as eternally competing, abstract principles. Luther spoke of the Law and the Gospel as God’s left hand and God’s right hand. Instead – and I think Moo is absolutely correct here – the Law and the Gospel refer to contrasting epochs in redemptive history. It is the contrast between the Abrahamic covenant which is characterized by promise and grace, and the Mosaic covenant which is characterized by demand and curse. That is how Paul defines the contrast in Galatians 3.

Moo says, “The Reformers, as most theologians today, use ‘law’ to mean *anything that demands something of us*. In this sense, ‘law’ is a basic factor in all of human history; and man is in every age,

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*Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and New Testaments. Essays in Honor of S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.* (Westchester: Crossway, 1988); “The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses: A Modified Lutheran View,” pp. 83-90, 165-73, 218-25, 309-15, 319-76 in *The Law, the Gospel, and the Modern Christian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993); “New Covenant Law,” a lecture delivered at Westminster Seminary California (February 26, 2002).

whether in the OT or NT, confronted with ‘law.’ What is crucial to recognize is that this is not the way in which Paul usually uses the term *nomos*.”<sup>3</sup>

As a result of this abstract definition of law, the Reformers argued that, although we are not justified by keeping the Law, nevertheless the Law ought to function as the rule of life to direct the believer in sanctification. Of course, it should, if the Law is defined non-historically as the moral will of God for all men in all places and times. How could the Law not be the rule of life for the believer?

It is crucial that we recognize that in Paul’s usage, the Law almost always refers to *the Mosaic Law as a covenant*. It never refers to what in theology we call “the moral law.” We’ll deal with this more next week, Lord willing.

Because they failed to grasp the redemptive historical and covenantal nature of the Law, and reduced the Law merely to the ten commandments, which was then further reduced to the moral will of God – the Reformers missed some important accents in Paul’s teaching on sanctification. As an example of this, let me quote from one Puritan author. As I read this quote, ask yourself if this sounds like something Paul would say: “The law sends us to the Gospel, that we may be justified, and the Gospel sends us to the law againe to enquire what is our dutie being justified.”<sup>4</sup>

Doesn’t sound like Paul to me! Nowhere in Paul do we read that, after we are justified, the Gospel sends us back to the Law for sanctification. Paul says that the Law sends us to the Gospel for *both* justification *and* sanctification. Paul teaches that the Law is not only unable to justify us, it is also totally ineffective to sanctify us.

Recall Paul’s argument in Romans. In Romans 1-5, Paul demonstrates conclusively that we are justified by faith alone apart from the works of the Law. Then, in chapter 6, he deals with the objection that the legalists and Judaizers of his day often threw in his face. “What shall we say, shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?” And what does Paul do at this point? Throughout chapters 6, 7, and 8, never once does Paul say, “No, you misunderstood my argument against the Law. I was only saying that no one can be justified by the Law. I never meant to imply that we are free from the Law with regard to sanctification. Now that we are justified by faith apart from the Law, the Law re-appears in the Christian life, not as a means of justification but as the unchanging rule of life for sanctification.”

That’s not what we read! What Paul does is point us again to Christ, to Christ’s death and resurrection. He does not leave the topic of our free justification by virtue of union with Christ established in chapters 1-5. Instead, he simply shows us the implications of that very union for sanctification. Both justification and sanctification are rooted in Christ, *both* are by faith alone, and *both* are apart from the Law.

Romans 6:1-4: What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? 2 May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

Paul has taken his stand upon the ground of Christ crucified. Even when he might be tempted to bring the Law back in, in some seemingly harmless, non-justifying role, he simply refuses to budge. In verse 14 he specifically shunts that option to the side and flatly declares that we are not under Law but under grace.

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<sup>3</sup> Moo, “‘Law,’ ‘Works of the Law,’ and Legalism in Paul,” *WTJ* 45 (1983) 88, emphasis added.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted by Ernest Kevan, *The Grace of Law* (Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1993), pp. 175-6.

One common attempt to evade the implication of this verse is to distinguish between the curse of the Law and the precepts of the Law, and to argue that Paul’s statement that we are “not under the Law” applies only to the Law’s curse. Christ has delivered us from the curse of the Law, but we are still under the Law in the sense of being obligated to obey its precepts.

But if that is what verse 14 meant, why does Paul raise the objection in verse 15, “What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?” As Westerholm points out, “A Paul who meant that the Law’s curse has been removed, though its precepts must be followed ... would hardly be pressed to refute the charge of promoting iniquity.”<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, this interpretation doesn’t explain the first part of the verse where Paul says, “Sin shall not be master over you.” In context, sin having mastery over someone is not a reference merely to the guilt or condemnation of sin, but to the sway and hold of sin in a person’s life. Paul views sin as a power to which we are enslaved apart from Christ. To back up this statement that sin shall not be master over us, Paul adds, “for you are not under Law but under grace.”

How does the fact that in Christ we are not under obligation to keep the Law support this statement? Well, for the moment, Paul doesn’t really explain how that might be the case. For the rest of chapter 6 he is simply content to spell out the contrasting and mutual exclusive dominions of sin and of Christ. You are either a slave of sin or a slave of Christ, but not both, Paul says. You cannot serve two masters. Praise God that we who once were slaves of sin have by grace been freed from sin and are now slaves of God.

Then, in chapter 7, Paul returns again to the subject of the Law, and he explains how it is that not being under the Law – how not being subject to its commanding authority is central to his argument that sin does not have mastery over us.

Romans 7:1-6: Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives? 2 For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. 3 So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man. 4 Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. 5 For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were *aroused* by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. 6 But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.

The key is verse 5: “the sinful passions which were aroused by the Law.” In other words, when we are under the Law – subject to its demands and threatened by its curse – the Law stirred up sin, provoking us to rebellion. Paul goes on in the rest of chapter 7 to clarify that the Law is not the cause of sin. He has already stated in chapter 5 that the reign of sin in the world is due to Adam’s transgression. “Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Rom. 5:12).

However, when the Mosaic Law came into this preexisting situation of man’s fallen state, the Law had the effect of increasing and intensifying Adamic humanity’s enslavement to the reign of sin and death (Rom. 5:20). The Jews believed that God’s gift of the Torah at Sinai was a great bulwark against sin, a wonderful gift to help man in his battle with sin. Paul says, Quite the contrary! The Law cannot assist sinful man escape the enslaving grip of sin. The Law actually makes matters worse!

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<sup>5</sup> Westerholm, *Israel’s Law and the Church’s Faith*, p. 199.

We now understand what Paul means in Romans 6:14. “Sin shall not be master over you,” Paul says. Why? “For you are not under Law but under grace.” The implication is clear. As long as you are under Law, as long as you are under its commanding authority and bound by its terms, sin will be your master, because being under the Law makes you just want to sin even more.

Paul says our life under the law was like a bad marriage. When we were in the flesh, apart from Christ, we were married to the Law. Our former husband was holy and righteous and good. But when his righteous commands were placed upon us in our sinful state in the flesh, the combination of righteous commands and our inability to keep them, only made sin flare up even worse. It was a dysfunctional relationship.

But thanks be to God that by union with Christ in his death, we have gotten out of our previous marriage. And this deliverance was totally legal! It wasn't that we started to commit adultery with a new husband while the old husband was still alive. No! Our first marriage came to a legal end on the cross. Death legally and permanently severed the marriage bound.

As a result of this death, we are no longer in the flesh, we are married to another husband, to Jesus Christ himself. Just as death severs a marriage bond, leaving the living spouse free to remarry, so our being united with Christ in his death has fundamentally altered our relationship to the Law. In Christ we have died to the Law. We are delivered from it. Now we are married to another. Jesus Christ is our new husband. The place of headship and lordship formerly occupied by the Law over our conscience and our actions, is now occupied by Christ himself.

### **Application**

The question is not whether there are commandments which bind the Christian today. Anyone who reads the New Testament knows that there are. Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). The question is whether the Mosaic Law, or any portion thereof, binds the Christian today as a covenant, that is, as our immediate standard of conduct. To this, Paul gives a clear and definitive answer. He states unequivocally that we have died to the Law, that we are no longer under it, and that it is not our husband and has no more power to command us any more than a husband has to command his dead wife. And if it be objected, “But what about the ten commandments? Aren't Christians still commanded to obey their parents, and to abstain from adultery and murder and stealing, and so on?” Paul's reply is simple: “Yes, we are required to do those things, but those requirements come to us in a new form, and on the basis of a new legal authority. All the commands that the new covenant believer is required to obey, come directly from Jesus Christ. He, and he alone, is our husband. He, and he alone, has the authority to direct how we are to live.”

Paradoxically, believing the good news that we are no longer married to the Law and accountable to heed its shrill voice of authority, is the very thing that will enable us to do what the Law required. As we enjoy our liberty from the Law and relish the new headship of our new husband, and heed his gracious voice, lo and behold, we discover that the righteousness that the Law demanded all along is being fulfilled in us by the Spirit (Rom. 8:4). We no longer serve God in the old way of the old covenant. The old way of the letter engraved on stone has been replaced by the new way of the new covenant. We now serve God by serving Christ. This is the way of the Spirit. And in so doing we bring forth fruit that is pleasing to him.

Romans 7 is vitally important for a proper appreciation of Paul's view of the Law. That is why I have chosen “Married to Another” as the title for this series. Lord willing over the next 7 or 8 weeks, we will look at this key text in greater depth. Next week we will set the stage by examining Paul's covenantal conception of the Law. If we fail to understand Paul's covenant theology, we will completely miss what he is trying to say when he says that we have died to the Law and are now married to Another.

**Sermon 2:  
Paul’s Covenantal Conception of the Law**  
1-27-02

This morning, I’d like to focus on the word “Law” in Paul’s usage. This issue of definition is vitally important. If we aren’t absolutely clear on what Paul means when he uses this key word, when we start looking at the key passages where Paul addresses the topic of the Law, our exegetical vision will be clouded. In fact, I would argue that one of the main reasons that there is so much confusion about Paul’s view of the Law is that interpreters have approached Paul with the assumption that they already knew what he meant by the term Law.

In Greek the word for law is *nomos*. The word *nomos* occurs 121 times in Paul’s writings. 88% of those occurrences are found in Romans and Galatians – the two books in which Paul deals most extensively with the topic of the Law.

Traditionally, the word *nomos* has been interpreted to mean “the moral law.” This is a post-biblical theological category. It refers to the ethical standards of God’s unchanging will, the basic standards of righteousness binding on all mankind. All men know that it is wrong to murder, to lie, to steal, cheat, and commit adultery. These things are revealed not only in the covenantal legislation that God gave to Israel at Mount Sinai, but by means of the light of nature or conscience, so that everyone, both Jews and Gentiles, will be held accountable to these standards of righteousness on the day of judgment. In theology, this is called the moral law.

Let’s see what happens if we try to approach Paul on the assumption that *nomos* means the moral law. Consider, for example, Romans 2:12: “For all who have sinned without *nomos* will also perish without *nomos*, and all who have sinned under *nomos* will be judged by *nomos*.”

Paul says that some people are “without *nomos*.” If *nomos* means the moral law, we’ve got a problem, because we know that all men have access to God’s moral standards of righteousness through creation and conscience! In fact, Paul says as much in Romans 2:14-15, when he says that the Gentiles have the work of the Law written on their heart:

For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, 15 in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them.

We cannot assume that the word “law” in our English Bibles has the same meaning that it does in theology. It is an easy mistake to make. A classic example is when people read the statement in James 2 that Abraham was “justified by works,” and assume that the word “justify” in our English translations means the same thing as it does in systematic theology, the imputation of Christ’s righteousness.

Obviously we need to revise our assumption that *nomos* means the moral law. According to Romans 2:12, the Gentiles do not have the *nomos*, and will be judged apart from the *nomos*. The Jews, by contrast, do have it and will be judged by it. This helps focus our understanding of how Paul uses this term. What is it that only the Jews are under, and that the Gentiles by definition are not under? It is the covenant that God made with Israel at Sinai. Paul uses *nomos* most often and most basically of the Mosaic law as a covenant.

Only those with whom the Mosaic covenant was made are obligated to obey the terms of that covenant. This is one of the axioms of covenant theology. The demands of a particular covenant only apply to those who are party to the covenant. When God made the covenant with Noah after the flood, the covenant of common grace, he entered into a covenant with every creature on earth. By contrast, when God

made the covenant with Israel at Sinai, he did not enter into a covenant with the whole world. He made the covenant only with the people of Israel.

Notice how carefully Paul uses the term. In Romans 2:15, he does not say that the Law itself is written on the hearts of the Gentiles, but “the work of the Law.” He then explains this in terms of conscience. Man’s conscience, then, is the functional equivalent of the Mosaic Law, serving the same function of producing the knowledge of sin.

In Paul’s usage, *nomos* consistently denotes the Sinai Covenant as a unit, without making any distinction among the so-called moral, civil, and ceremonial laws. It is the Law as a unit, in its totality.

Paul derived this covenantal conception of the Law from the OT itself. I would like to briefly point out some of the OT evidence on which Paul may have based this covenantal conception. Let’s begin by turning to the revelation of the Law as recorded in the book of Exodus:

Before we look at Exodus 20, we need to back up one chapter and look at the often overlooked context in Exodus 19:1-6:

In the third month after the sons of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. 2 When they set out from Rephidim, they came to the wilderness of Sinai and camped in the wilderness; and there Israel camped in front of the mountain. 3 Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel: 4 ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and *how* I bore you on eagles’ wings, and brought you to Myself. 5 ‘Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; 6 and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel.”

The Mosaic covenant was transacted with those who were redeemed by God’s outstretched arm when he divided the Red Sea, and with their children. The covenant was grounded in the historical event of God’s divine intervention in history to redeem a people to be his very own possession. The nations of the ancient world were not redeemed. They were not God’s possession. Therefore, they are not parties to the covenant, and have no obligation to keep the laws of that covenant. Later on the ten commandments are referred to as “the tablets of the covenant” (Deut. 9:9-11).

This brings us to Exodus 20:1-2: “Then God spoke all these words, saying, ‘I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.’” As Professor Meredith Kline has shown, this verse is parallel to the preamble and the historical prologue sections in the ancient near eastern treaties between the suzerain and his vassal.<sup>6</sup> The suzerain is the great king. The vassal is a subordinate king who is seeking the protection of the great king, promising to serve him, to pay an annual tribute of so many shekels of gold, and to offer his troops in defense of the suzerain should he be attacked.

A sample preamble from one Hittite treaty begins: “These are the words of the Sun Suppiluliumas, the great king, the king of the Hatti land.”<sup>7</sup> This is then followed by the historical prologue where the great king recounts the preceding history of his relationship with the vassal, usually focusing on how he had shown kindness to the vassal and had protected him against his enemies. In Exodus 20, the preamble is the statement, “I am the Lord your God.” The historical review is merely summarized in the statement, “... who brought you up out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” In fact, the entire book of Genesis and the first half of Exodus function as the historical prologue to the covenant at Sinai.

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<sup>6</sup> For Kline’s analysis of the treaty-format and its biblical-theological significance, see his *Treaty of the Great King and The Structure of Biblical Authority*.

<sup>7</sup> James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton, 1955).

Another important parallel with the ancient covenants is the fact that the covenant was normally written on two clay or stone tablets. One copy was deposited in the temple of the gods of the great king, and the other copy was deposited in the temple of the gods of the vassal. The same is true in this case. The two tablets of the Sinai covenant do not refer to the first four commandments and the last six commandments, but to two copies of the entire covenant document, both of which were placed inside the ark of the covenant, for Israel’s God and Israel’s suzerain are one and the same.

The preamble and historical prologue then introduce the ten commandments. We do not have time to examine each in detail, but notice the sanctions appended to the first three commandments, as well as the fifth:

Exodus 20:3-7, 12: You shall have no other gods before Me. 4 You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, 6 but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments. 7 You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain ... 12 Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you.

These blessings and the curses are another piece of evidence that highlights the covenantally specific nature of the Law. The blessings and the curses are *temporal* blessings and *temporal* curses that pertain to Israel’s life in the earthly land of Canaan. These temporal rewards and judgments are typological. They point to the ultimate reward of eternal life in heaven, and to the ultimate judgment of eternal separation from God in hell. Like the previous argument, this demonstrates that the Mosaic Law is more than a set of ethical principles governing behavior. It is a covenant in which human behavior becomes the condition of reward or judgment, blessing or curse. It is a covenant of works. In Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27, the blessings and curses found here find fuller expression. The blessings are to be pronounced on Mount Gerazim and the curses on Mount Ebal.

God has given Israel the ten commandments. This is followed in chapters 21-23 by various additional laws governing both cult and culture, that is, both the worship and polity of Israel as a nation. Then, in chapter 24 we come to the covenant ratification ceremony proper.

Exodus 24:1-12: Then He said to Moses, “Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and seventy of the elders of Israel, and you shall worship at a distance. 2 “Moses alone, however, shall come near to the LORD, but they shall not come near, nor shall the people come up with him.” 3 Then Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice and said, “All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do!” 4 Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. Then he arose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. 5 He sent young men of the sons of Israel, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as peace offerings to the LORD. 6 Moses took half of the blood and put *it* in basins, and the *other* half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. 7 Then he took the book of the covenant and read *it* in the hearing of the people; and they said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!” 8 So Moses took the blood and sprinkled *it* on the people, and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.” 9 Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, 10 and they saw the God of Israel; and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself. 11 Yet He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel; and they saw God, and they ate and drank. 12 Now the LORD said to Moses,

“Come up to Me on the mountain and remain there, and I will give you the stone tablets with the law and the commandment which I have written for their instruction.”

This passage is crucial. The covenant ratification ceremony involved the offering of various sacrifices, followed by the sprinkling of blood upon the people, culminating in a fellowship meal. Moses and Aaron and his two sons, along with the 70 elders of Israel, went up on the mountain, and we are told that “they saw God, and they ate and drank,” thus sealing the covenant and entering into communion with God.

Later on in Scripture the covenant making at Sinai is recalled in very significant terms. E.g., In Psalm 50:5 we read: “Gather to me my sanctified ones who cut the covenant with me over sacrifices.” Notice that those who thus cut the covenant with Yahweh over sacrifice are called “the sanctified or consecrated ones.” This supports what I said earlier about one of the key axioms of covenant theology. Only those who entered into the covenant relationship are thus set apart as consecrated unto God, and thus they alone are obligated to the terms of the covenant.

Even more important is the phrase “to cut a covenant.” The same phrase is used to refer to the covenant ratification ceremony in which animals were slaughtered to confirm the covenant. This terminology is first used in the Bible in Genesis 15 when God entered into a covenant with Abraham. Recall the ceremony involved cutting animals in two, and God himself appeared in the form of a smoking oven and a flaming torch, and he passed between the pieces. Later on God recounts what happened there, and he says that he swore an oath with Abraham. In effect, God had pronounced a hypothetical curse upon himself, “May I be accursed like these sacrificial animals if I should prove unfaithful to my promise to Abraham.” This is called a self-maledictory oath. It was a guarantee of unconditional and sovereign grace in which God bound himself to fulfill his promise.<sup>8</sup>

But notice the sharp contrast between the covenant that God made with Abraham, and this covenant here in Exodus 24. Whereas God himself took the oath in Genesis 15, in Exodus 24 it is the people who take the oath.<sup>9</sup>

Exodus 24:7: “Then he took the book of the covenant and read *it* in the hearing of the people; and they said, ‘All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!’” The people are binding themselves to obedience. They are calling God’s curse upon themselves should they prove unfaithful to do all that God has commanded in the Law.

And so, in keeping with this binding of themselves to obedience, the blood of the covenant is sprinkled upon them. Verse 8: “So Moses took the blood and sprinkled *it* on the people, and said, ‘Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.’” The covenant ratification ceremony includes many elements, but central to them all is the sprinkling of the blood, which speaks of the curse of death that the breakers of the covenant must face. This is the equivalent of Israel passing between the slaughtered animal carcasses, thus making a self-maledictory oath. The only way that any Israelite can escape death for covenant transgression is to offer a sacrifice, a substitute who dies in his place.

This brief survey of the giving of the Law in Exodus has highlighted the covenantal character of the Mosaic Law. In Paul’s writings, it is clear that he is operating with this covenantal conception derived from the OT. This explains why he never uses the term *nomos* to refer to the eternal moral will of God, which is binding on all men from creation onward, whether Jew or Gentile.

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<sup>8</sup> Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, pp. 294-99.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-7.

## Romans 7:1-6

Let's return to the text that I have chosen as the basis for this whole series, Romans 7:1-6. If we start off with the definition of *nomos* as the moral law, we are bound to make some serious exegetical errors as we interpret Paul's teaching here on the Law.

For example, if we assume that *nomos* means the moral will of God, then we might be tempted to interpret Paul's declaration of our freedom from the Law in an antinomian sense as if believers are free to worship other gods, to steal and lie, to commit adultery and murder. Some fringe groups in the history of the church taught exactly that. The Ranters, for example, were a group at the time of the Westminster Assembly who taught that we should sin in order that grace may abound, and they based this misguided conclusion on a simplistic reading of Paul's teaching here. And of course, the practical consequences for this kind of thinking are disastrous in the Christian life. Indeed, Paul says that those who abuse grace in this way will not inherit the kingdom of God.

On the other hand, those who are opposed to antinomianism may make the mistake of interpreting Paul's statement that we have been delivered from the Law as merely asserting that we are delivered from the Law when falsely interpreted as a means of justification. But Paul appeals to the death of Christ as the legal ground of our deliverance from the Mosaic Law. It is hard to understand why such a drastic method was needed to deliver us from a misunderstanding of the Law.

Romans 7:4: Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.

Both of these approaches, that of the antinomian and that of the anti-antinomian, are flawed, because they both fail to read Paul's statements in light of his covenantal conception of the Law. What we must grasp is that Paul is referring to the Mosaic Law here. And he is declaring that through Christ's death we have been delivered from the Mosaic Law, which was a covenant of works.

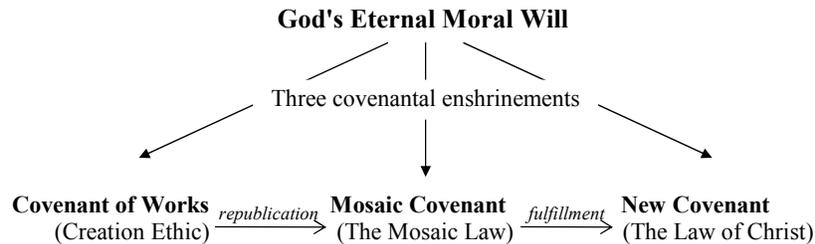
The covenantal imagery of this passage is explicit in the form of the analogy concerning marriage. Recall how frequently in the Bible the covenant between God and his people is depicted in marital terms. Yahweh is Israel's husband. Israel is Yahweh's bride. Obedience to the Law is described as marital faithfulness. Disobedience to the Law is often poetically pictured in the prophets as spiritual adultery and prostitution.

Thus, the issue here in Romans 7 is the transition from the old covenant to the new. God's people under the old covenant were married to the Law. Now that we have died to the Law, we have been married to another husband, that is, we have entered into a new covenant under the headship of Jesus Christ. These contrasting covenants are spoken of in verse 6 as the contrast between the letter and the Spirit, a contrast that Paul also uses in 2 Corinthians 3. Notice that he speaks of the *oldness* of the letter and the *newness* of the Spirit. These terms are intentional allusions to the old covenant and the new covenant respectively.

Further cementing the identification of our text as a covenantal transition from the old covenant to the new is the reference to the establishment of the new covenant "through the body of Christ." This is a reference to the flesh of Christ crucified upon the cross for our sins. There you have the slain carcasses of the covenant! This is a covenant ratification ceremony! A new covenant has been transacted!

## Application

Diagram: Three Covenantal Enshrinements of the Moral Will of God



The old covenant was an important enshrinement of God's eternal moral will, but it was given in the form of a covenant of works, and it was given only to the Jews. Now that Christ has come, and was born under the Law, the old covenant has been fulfilled, and the Law has been brought to an end. Ephesians 2:15: "He abolished in his flesh the Law with its commandments and regulations." The Law is not the immediate standard of conduct for the new covenant people of God.

This raises the question: Where do we learn the content of the moral will of God today? It is objectively revealed in the New Testament. It includes all of the ethical teaching of Jesus (e.g., the Sermon on the Mount; the two greatest commandments; the new commandment, etc.) and of the apostles (e.g., the extensive exhortations of Paul in his epistles grounded in the indicative-imperative dynamic of evangelical obedience). The New Testament also reaches back into the Old Testament to draw out ethical implications from the Mosaic Law, interpreted in light of its fulfillment in Christ. This provides a hermeneutical model for us to follow. We should study the Mosaic Law, not as if it were directly binding on us, but as those who have the mind of Christ we should weigh, test, and approve the old covenant Scriptures in order to discern what is that good and perfect will of God (Rom. 12:2). The Mosaic Law does contain ethical principles grounded in creation as seen in the covenant of works with Adam. This creation ethic is not relaxed or negated in the Law of Christ but transformed and fulfilled in the new creation. The substance of the righteousness demanded in the Mosaic Law finds expression in new covenant form in the Law of Christ.

What has changed is the covenantal dynamics. The new covenant people of God have died to the Law as a covenant of works. We are no longer serving in the oldness of the letter. We now serve in the newness of the Spirit. Christ is our head. The commandments of Christ are not a burdensome yoke. The Law of Christ does not arouse our sinful passions the way the Mosaic Law did. Unlike the covenant of works at creation and its republication at Sinai, the Law of Christ is the indicative of who we are in Christ, and that indicative contains the imperatives which call us to live in accordance with who we are in Christ. It is not a covenant of works that says, "Do this and live." It does not come as an external code with conditions and threats. Instead, it comes to us from within, by the Spirit, who conforms us to the image of Christ, and impels us to walk in obedience to him.

**Sermon 3:**  
**The Function of the Law in Redemptive History**  
2-3-02

Read the first four paragraphs of Chapter 19 (“Of the Law of God”) of *The Westminster Confession of Faith*.

“1. God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works, by which He bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience; promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it; and endued him with power and ability to keep it.

“2. *This law*, after his fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness; and, as such, was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments, and written in two tables; the first four commandments containing our duty towards God; and the other six, our duty to man.

“3. Besides this law, commonly called moral, God was pleased to give to the people of Israel, as a church under age, ceremonial laws, containing several typical ordinances; partly of worship, prefiguring Christ, His graces, actions, sufferings, and benefits; and partly of divers instructions of moral duties. All which ceremonial laws are now abrogated under the new testament.

“4. To them also, as a body politic, He gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the state of that people, not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require.”

According to *The Westminster Confession*, the Decalogue is a perfect rule of righteousness, that is, a perfect standard defining God’s moral will for mankind. Furthermore, it is a timeless and universal expression of God’s moral will. We see this right at the very outset in the first two paragraphs of chapter 19 where the Westminster divines state that the moral law was originally given to Adam in the garden, and then they go on to say that *this law* was delivered on Mount Sinai in ten commandments.

The problem is that this is an a-covenantal approach to the Decalogue as eternal moral law. It wouldn’t be so bad if paragraph 2 had said that the moral law is republished in the Decalogue as a covenant of works. Instead, they drop the wonderful covenantal definition of paragraph 1, and say that the moral law was first given in the garden and from that point on “this law ... continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness.”

We must go on to immediately point out that the Assembly does not have an a-covenantal approach to the entire Mosaic Law. It is just the Decalogue that gets this a-covenantal treatment. Because when you read on in paragraphs 3-4, the Assembly recognizes that everything given after the ten commandments *is* covenantally conditioned – “Besides this law ...” the ceremonial laws and the civil laws were also given to Israel (WCF 19:3-4). By saying this, the divines show that they understood that the civil laws and the ceremonial laws were given to Israel as a distinctive covenant community, with a theocratic polity, and an earthly temple, and that therefore these portions of the Mosaic Law can’t be applied directly in the new covenant. In fact they say the ceremonial and civil laws have been abrogated.

This three-fold division of the Law is not perfect. It was developed by medieval theologians as a rough first stab at a covenantal approach to the Mosaic Law. As such it’s a handy but imperfect algorithm to get you started exegetically. The problem is that the Westminster divines set the Decalogue aside as being pure eternal moral law, thus in effect *exempting* the ten commandments from this covenantal analysis at the outset. They recognize that other dimensions of Israel’s Law must be covenantally filtered before we apply them, but they don’t recognize that with regard to the Decalogue. Why? Because they have started out with the presupposition that the Decalogue is timeless moral law, first given to Adam, subsequently “delivered” in written form at Sinai virtually without change.

T. David Gordon is one contemporary Reformed theologian who teaches the approach to the Law that I am taking in this series. Professor Gordon argues that the Westminster divines “take the Decalogue, and drive it back into the garden, which justifies their driving it forward, not only until the return of Christ but beyond the return of Christ – because they made it a timeless expression, something which has nothing to do with the unique circumstances of Israel, but something which reflects that abiding moral will of God given to Adam earlier in the garden, and for that very reason built into the nature of our relations as humans and that which would govern us forever.”<sup>10</sup>

Professor Gordon goes on to say that the concern here is with the *theory* of the Law given in chapter 19 of the Confession, not so much with the exposition of the ten commandments in the Larger and Shorter Catechisms. Although there are some minor exegetical flaws, on the whole, the Westminster divines expound each of the ten commandments in light of the teaching of the New Testament. (One flaw would be their inconsistent approach to the fourth commandment. They correctly appeal to the New Testament in order to establish the change to the first day of the week, arguing that the Lord’s Day is the Christian Sabbath. But they inconsistently revert back to the Mosaic Sabbath to define the manner in which the Lord’s Day is to be kept holy.)

We have no (major) bones to pick with the divines when it comes to the practical do’s and don’ts of the Christian life – the bottom line of Christian ethics. The real area of concern is with the theoretical treatment at the outset, primarily with the way the second paragraph of WCF 19 is connected back to the first paragraph with the words, “this law.” This essentially places the ten commandments back in the garden as a timeless moral law given to Adam before the fall.

### **Romans 5:12-21**

Having looked at the teaching of the Westminster Confession, let’s turn to Romans 5:12-21 to see how Paul approaches this issue. We will see that Paul sets forth a very different conception of the Law. For Paul, the Law came in, after the Fall, in order to make sin increase.

Romans 5:12-21: Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned -- 13 for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. 14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. 15 But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. 16 The gift is not like *that which came* through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment *arose* from one *transgression* resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift *arose* from many transgressions resulting in justification. 17 For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. 18 So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. 19 For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous. 20 The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, 21 so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The context here is that Paul is comparing and contrasting Adam and Christ. Verse 12: “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned --.” Paul breaks off in mid sentence and does not resume the second part of the parallelism until verses 18-19.

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<sup>10</sup> T. David Gordon, “Paul’s Understanding of the Law,” tape # 3 (Westminster Media, 1996).

What is the fundamental point of comparison between Adam and Christ? It is that both are covenant heads. A covenant head is someone who stands in the covenant relationship on behalf of those whom he represents. When Adam sinned in the garden, he did so in a representative capacity. His sin was not a private affair, but the covenant transgression of a public person acting on our behalf. The result is that all men, descending from Adam, are reckoned as covenant breakers because of Adam’s one act of disobedience which is reckoned to their account. In a similar manner, Christ obeyed as a covenant head, so that his one act of righteousness, that is his obedience to the point of death, is reckoned to the account of all the elect.

Now in verses 13-14 Paul interrupts himself. Before completing the comparison, Paul realizes that if he is going to show the parallels between Adam and Christ, he must first demonstrate that Adam’s sin was covenantal and imputed on the basis of his unique role as covenant head. The function of the parenthesis, then, is to set forth a powerful argument demonstrating that this is indeed the case.

What is Paul’s argument? He singles out a particular segment in covenantal history, the period after the fall of Adam up until the giving of the Torah through Moses. Paul uses two chronological phrases to isolate this segment of covenantal history: “until the Law” (verse 13), and “from Adam to Moses” (verse 14). These two phrases denote the same segment of redemptive history, namely, the epoch after Adam’s fall up to the giving of the Law at Sinai.

Having isolated that period of covenant history, from Adam to Moses, Paul now makes his argument. The first premise in verse 13a is non-controversial. “Until the Law, sin was in the world.” Between Adam and Moses there are numerous evidences of sinful activity in the world. Cain slew his brother Abel. In the days of Noah, all flesh had corrupted itself upon the earth and had to be destroyed in the flood. And so on. The existence of sin in the world after Adam’s fall and prior to the giving of the Law at Sinai is undisputed.

Then, in verse 13b, Paul lays down a second premise, a theological axiom: “But sin is not imputed when there is no law.” The Greek word for “imputed” here means “to charge to someone’s account.” Sin is not charged to the account when there is no covenantal framework in which sin is defined and punishment can be meted out. The argument here depends on Paul’s usage of the word *nomos*. As we have seen, *nomos* does not mean an ethical standard universally binding on all men, but a covenant based on the works principle. In such a covenant, obedience is rewarded with life, and transgression of the covenant is punished with death.

Even though God’s moral will continues after the fall and is revealed to all men through creation and conscience, leaving all mankind without excuse, nevertheless that moral will does not constitute what Paul refers to as *nomos*. This was the point I tried to make last week in our discussion of Paul’s covenantal conception of the Law. If *nomos* here means moral law, then Paul’s statement in verse 13 that there was no *nomos* until the arrival of the Mosaic Law would conflict with his earlier argument in Romans 2:14 concerning the moral culpability and inexcusability of the Gentiles even apart from special revelation. *Nomos*, then, is more specific than the moral will of God. It is a covenant arrangement in which the sanction of death is threatened against those who transgress the covenant.

Returning to the logical argument. “Nevertheless, death reigned...” If death is the wages of sin, and if sin is not taken into account unless there is a law, it follows that those who died from Adam until Moses, died because they were being imputed with Adam’s sin under the covenant of creation. Paul has demonstrated that the covenant breaking of Adam was a covenant breaking of a covenant head, whose one transgression has inaugurated a *reign* or *dominion* of sin and of death, in which all men are hopelessly enslaved, totally unable to rescue themselves from the overwhelming power of Adam’s sin and its divinely applied death sanction.

Then in verse 20, Paul returns to the issue that he raised in his parenthesis in verses 13-14, namely, “How does the Law fit in?” This statement would have been revolutionary in Paul’s day. The Jews generally believed that the giving of the Torah to Israel was a positive thing, a means of grace by which Israel would recover all the lost glory of Adam. For Paul, by contrast, the Law “came in” to this picture of Adam’s imputed sin and the reign of death upon all mankind on the basis of his one sin, not in order to undo Adam’s sin – for that belongs to Christ alone – but in order to turn sins into covenantal transgressions, thus exacerbating and amplifying the hopeless situation of fallen Adamic humanity enslaved under the reign of sin and death. The Torah is placed not on the side of the solution, but on the side of the problem.

What can we learn from this passage concerning the function of the Law in redemptive history? Notice that Paul selected the period “from Adam to Moses” as the basis for his argument (v. 14). Paul had to isolate the pre-Mosaic era because the coming of the Law changed the situation by re-introducing a *nomos*-type arrangement. After Sinai, sin reappeared in the likeness of Adam. According to Paul, then, God’s pre-fall covenant with Adam, and his post-fall covenant with Israel under the Mosaic Law, both involved the presence of *nomos*, that is, both were covenantal arrangements in which obedience was rewarded with life and transgression was punishable by death.<sup>11</sup>

Notice, as well, that Paul sees the sins committed by the sons of Adam after the fall as sins, but not as sins committed in the likeness of the transgression of Adam. But what about the sins of Israel? Paul singles out the period from Adam to Moses, because when the Law comes at Sinai sin reappears in the likeness of the transgression of Adam. In other words, the introduction of the Law, as a covenant of works, had the effect of transforming sin into violations of the covenant that *are* like Adam’s covenant transgression. There are two other key passages where Paul makes this same point:

Romans 4:15 ... for the Law brings about wrath, but *where there is no law, there also is no violation.*

Galatians 3:19 *Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions*, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made.

The translation “because of transgressions” (Greek: *charin*) is inaccurate. The NASB has a footnote that comes closer: “The Law was added for the sake of defining transgressions.” In other words, the Law came into the pre-existing situation of human sinfulness, and since it was a covenant of works, it had the effect of turning sins into transgressions of the covenant. When you transgress the covenant, the covenant itself is broken, just as Adam broke the covenant when he ate of the forbidden tree. This is quite different from the many sins that were committed by the sons of Adam in the context of pre-existing sin and condemnation already brought about by Adam’s transgression.

This passage is a helpful cross-reference to Romans 5:20. The first function of the Mosaic Law is that it was added, or it entered into, the state of man after the fall, in order to reveal the true nature of sin as a violation of the covenant, thus sealing man’s enslavement to the guilt and power of sin.

But in Galatians 3 Paul brings out a second function as well, and that is highlighted here in the context of Galatians 3 and 4 as a whole. The Law was inserted into the midst of redemptive history “until the Seed should come.” This thought is picked up later ...

Galatians 4:4-5: But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

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<sup>11</sup> Meredith G. Kline, “Gospel Until the Law: Rom 5:13-14 and the Old Covenant,” *JETS* 34/4 (Dec. 1991) 433-46.

In other words, from the outset God gave it with the coming of Christ in view. He gave the Law to provide the proper covenantal context in which Christ would accomplish our redemption. Christ was born under the Law, in order to take upon himself the Law’s curse (Gal. 3:13) and in order to fulfill the Law’s positive demands.

The Mosaic covenant of works was *not* given to Israel in the same way that it was given to Adam in paradise. It was a “subservient covenant,” to use the language of two Puritans, Samuel Bolton and Edward Fisher,<sup>12</sup> who wrote at the same time as the Westminster Assembly. The Mosaic covenant of works was not intended to supplant or replace the covenant of grace established with Abraham. “It was *added* because of transgressions until the Seed should come” (Gal. 3:19). It was added as a subservient covenant in order to set the stage for the execution of God’s eternal decree to save the elect through Jesus Christ the promised Seed.

“Is the Law then against the promises of God? God forbid!” (Gal. 3:21). The Mosaic Covenant was not given as a means of justification, which would nullify the earlier Abrahamic promise. Rather, it was subordinated to the covenant of grace and thus the Mosaic covenant of works was given, not as if Israel could perform its requirements and be justified thereby, but precisely to show Israel’s inability and failure under the Law, thus preparing the way for God to do that which Israel could not do.

“For what the Law could not do, because it was weak through the flesh, God did. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the righteous requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us ... For Christ is the end (fulfillment that terminates) of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Romans 8:3-4; 10:4).

By being born under the Mosaic Law and fulfilling it in our place, both as to its precept and as to its penalty, he wrought a perfect righteousness, a divine righteousness, which is imputed to our account as a gift and received by faith alone. As a result, we who are aware of our guilt, of our state as those who are totally destitute of righteousness, but who are nevertheless resting in and receiving this freely offered righteousness – we are the ones who are judicially regarded in God’s sight as if we ourselves had fulfilled the absolute perfection of the Law.

### **Application**

The Westminster Confession says that the function of the Law in redemptive history is to serve as a perfect rule of righteousness, and it does this both before and after the fall, as a timeless expression of God’s moral will. Since it is a timeless moral law, the law continues even for the redeemed to function in this capacity as the believer’s rule of life.

This is not what Paul teaches. As we saw last week, and again this morning, the Law is not a timeless moral law, but the specific historical covenant established with Israel at Sinai. And this covenant was a covenant of works, like the covenant of works with Adam in the garden. As such, as a covenant of works, the function of the Mosaic Law in redemptive history is twofold.

First, to turn sins into covenantal transgressions, thus increasing sin and sealing us in the state of helpless enslavement under the power and condemnation of sin. It shuts Israel up under sin.

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<sup>12</sup> Samuel Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom* (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994; originally published 1643), see pp. 99, 101, 105, 107. Edward Fisher, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity, with notes by Thomas Boston* (Edmonton, AB: Still Waters Revival Books, 1991; originally published in 1646), see pp. 53-65.

Second, having shut Israel up under sin, the Law then provides the necessary legal framework for the incarnation of the Son of God, so that by his perfect obedience under the Law, and by satisfying the Law’s curse in our place, we might be justified in the sight of God.

Indeed, the ten commandments are one covenantal enshrinement of God’s eternal moral will. But precisely because they enshrine the moral will of God in the form of a covenant of works, the ten commandments *cannot* be the rule of righteousness for the believer. The Law, with its blessings and curses – the whole issue of Israel’s probationary tenure in the land – was intentionally designed by God to set the legal framework of a covenantal works arrangement, which would then serve as the redemptive historical setting for Christ’s incarnation and obedience under the Law.

If the Decalogue were merely a rule of righteousness, and not a covenant of works, then the Law could never have functioned in this way. Conversely, the fact that the Law did indeed serve this Christological role demonstrates that the Mosaic Law was a covenant of works.

It is absolutely vital to never look at the ten commandments merely as rule of life, as if the blessings and curses and conditionality of the Law could somehow be stripped away, leaving the Law as a mere standard. Why? Because by defanging the Law into a mere standard, it loses its nature as a covenant of works. And once it loses its nature as a covenant of works, it no longer shows us our utter inability to keep it, and thus we are prone to deceive ourselves into thinking that we can somehow do it. And then what do we do? We start applying the Law to ourselves directly, skipping the absolutely essential step of first seeing how it was fulfilled by Christ in my place.

This is what happens in a subtle way when the Westminster divines go through each of the ten commandments in the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, as if they were describing the Christian life. They go through each commandment, describing what is the duty required and what are the sins forbidden. To their credit, however, the Westminster divines ultimately recognize the impossibility of doing what the Law requires. When they finally finish their exposition of the ten commandments, at the very end they ask, “Is any man able perfectly to keep the commandments of God?” (WSC # 82). The answer of course is no one can keep the Law perfectly. And so the divines go on immediately to point us to Christ. We can only be delivered from the curse of the Law by faith in Christ, repentance unto life, and the faithful use of the means of grace.

No one goes out and says, “I’m going to interpret and apply the ten commandments apart from Christ.” At least I hope not! But if we start off with the assumption that the ten commandments are only a *rule* and not a *covenant*, then we are setting ourselves up for precisely that Christless approach to the Law which rests ultimately on the fatal sin of self-deception, the sin of thinking that we can do what the Law requires. But if we refuse to defang the Law into an a-covenantal rule of life – if we leave the Law as it is, in all of its covenantal integrity and wholeness as a covenant of works, then we will be shut up to faith in Christ as the only means of fulfilling it.

**Sermon 4:**  
**Not Under Law But Under Grace**  
2-10-02

The theme of this series is Paul’s view of the Law. I’ve chosen the title “Married to Another,” because it captures Paul’s profound theological insights in a nutshell. As Paul teaches in Romans 7, we are no longer married to the Law. But we are not widows without a husband. For we have become married to Another, that is, to our risen Lord. Thus far we have been merely setting the stage so that we can approach Romans 7 intelligently.

Let us review what we have seen thus far. At the very outset, I wanted us to have a clear understanding of what Paul means when he uses the word *nomos* or Law. This definitional question is crucial. In systematic theology, the law means “the eternal moral law.” But in Pauline or biblical theology the Law most often and most basically refers to the historical Law given at Mount Sinai as a covenant of works.

It’s exceedingly important to get the lexical issue right. Otherwise, we will make some serious theological errors. Let me give you two examples. First, if *nomos* equals “the moral law,” then what do you do with Romans 5:13? “Before the law, sin was in the world.” If law here means the moral law, then Paul would be saying that people lived “before the moral law.” And that would mean that the moral will of God is not revealed in creation and conscience. Second, consider Romans 6:14. “You are not under law, but under grace.” If law here equals the moral law, then this verse teaches that being under grace frees us from the requirements of the moral will of God. Grace is a license to sin.

But such unorthodox conclusions can be avoided if we simply recognize that *nomos* in Paul does *not* mean the moral law but the Mosaic Law as a covenant. In the past two weeks, we have seen how our abstract, systematic way of thinking needs to be reformulated in light of Paul’s covenantal and redemptive-historical way of thinking. We have seen that Paul’s covenantal conception of the Law was derived from the OT itself. We looked at some of the highlights in the book of Exodus where the Lord gave the Law to Israel at Sinai. We saw that the ten commandments are not a timeless rule of life, but a concrete covenant made at a particular time with a particular people. In fact, the two copies of the Decalogue are called “the tablets of the covenant.” This is reinforced by the covenant ratification ceremony in Exodus 24 where Moses sprinkles the blood of the covenant upon the people. The ten commandments were not given to mankind in general. They were given to the covenant community of Israel to govern Israel’s probation in the land of Canaan.

Last week we looked at “The Function of the Law in Redemptive History.” We looked at that crucial passage in Romans 5:12-21 where Paul outlines the course of covenant history from Adam to Moses to the second Adam.

Romans 5:20 explains why God gave the Law: “It was added that the transgression might increase.” The Law was given in order to transform sins into violations of a covenant of works. Before the Law sin was already in the world. The coming of the Law at Sinai did not cause sin. But when the Law was superimposed upon the pre-existing situation of Adamic humanity’s sinful condition, the Law had the effect of sealing humanity in that fallen condition of enslavement to sin, for sins now became transgression of the covenant, and these covenant transgressions were then subject to the curse of the Law. When the Law came, sin became transgression. Transgression became curse. And curse became death. And death brought forth more sin.

“Why the Law then?” Paul asks in Galatians 3:19. “It was added in order to transform sins into covenantal transgressions, until the Seed should come.” From the very outset, the Law was given with a clear historical terminus in view – “until (*achris hou*) the Seed should come.” It was given with the incarnation of Christ in view. Sin first had to be made utterly sinful. It had to be shown for what it was, a

transgression and violation of a covenant order, on the basis of which the covenant curses are justly meted out to covenant violators. Then, and only then, would the incarnation have judicial significance. Only within the context of such a covenant arrangement could Christ be born as our covenant head to fulfill the Law for us by his perfect righteousness and obedience unto death.

How crucial it is to understand the Law in redemptive-historical and covenantal terms! As long we view the law in abstract terms as the timeless expression of God’s moral law, we will think that the Law was given to be a rule of life. That’s what our tradition says, and unless we rid ourselves of this incorrect definition of *nomos* we’ll go on thinking that the tradition is right, even though there isn’t a single passage anywhere in the NT which says that the Law is the rule of life for the new covenant believer. But if we stick to Scripture, if we stick to the clear and explicit statements that Paul makes about the function and purpose of the Law in redemptive history, then we’ll realize that the Law was never given as a rule but as a covenant. Either the Law is a covenant of works fulfilled by Christ, or it is a rule of life, but it can’t be both.

### **Romans 6:14**

This morning, I’d like to continue Paul’s argument in Romans 6, in order to set the context as Paul builds his case concerning the Law. My goal, as I have said, is to get to Romans 7. But we must be patient. Before moving on to our key text in Romans 7, we have to pause and take a look at a crucial verse right in the middle of Romans 6. In verse 14, Paul solemnly declares that “sin shall not be your master, for you are not under the Law but under grace.” This is an incredibly significant theological statement full of importance.

It is a link in a chain. The first link in the chain was in Romans 5:20, where Paul first brought in the Law on the side of the old age under Adam. Romans 6:14 is the second link in the chain. And the third link is Romans 7, where Paul finally addresses in detail the whole issue of the believer’s deliverance from the Law. Romans 5:20 and 6:14 are somewhat cryptic statements that Paul will proceed to unpack in Romans 7. Nevertheless, we can’t jump right to Romans 7 until we’ve examined the meaning of the preceding links in the chain. With that thought in mind, we turn to Paul’s statement in chapter 6:14 that “sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under the Law but under grace.”

John Murray argues that “under law” refers to the moral and spiritual condition of being in bondage to sin.<sup>13</sup> A person who is “under law” is an unconverted person. The problem with this interpretation is that it severs the chain that Paul is constructing from 5:20 to 6:14 to chapter 7. In 5:20, the Law clearly refers to the historical covenant given at Sinai. It is the Mosaic covenant. The same meaning applies in chapter 7. So how can the middle link here in 6:14 be referring to some non-historical concept like being unconverted? It’s the same word *nomos* that Paul has been using throughout the argument.

So what does “under law” mean? In Romans itself, the phrase only occurs here in verses 14 and 15. With so little to go on here, we need to look at how Paul uses the phrase in Galatians, where it occurs 5 times.

Galatians 3:23 But before faith came, we were kept in custody *under the Law*, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed.

The first thing that stands out right away is the redemptive historical focus of the entire context, beginning in 3:15 and continuing down through 4:7. The Law in context has clear chronological boundaries. It was added 430 years after the promises made to Abraham. That’s the starting point. The end point is stated in verse 19, as we have seen, “... until the Seed should come.” These are the two bookends of the Law. On the one end you have Moses at Sinai. On the other end you have Christ.

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<sup>13</sup> John Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), p. 188. See also Murray’s exegesis of Romans 6:14-15 in *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), vol. 1, pp. 228-31.

Prior to the coming of faith (that is, the object of faith, Jesus the Messiah), we were shut up under the Law. The phrase clearly describes the situation of the Jews under the old covenant prior to the coming of Christ.

Galatians 4:4-5: But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born *under the Law*, 5 so that He might redeem those who were *under the Law*, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

Jesus himself is born under this Law. Clearly Jesus was not under the Law in the sense of being unconverted, or in bondage to sin. It is an objective legal status. This is the most important instance of the phrase, the most illuminating. If Christ was under the Law it can only mean one thing: to be under the binding authority of the Mosaic Law as a covenant of works.

Murray agrees that in these passages in Galatians “under law” means the state of the Jews under the Mosaic economy prior to the coming of Christ. What doesn’t make any sense is that he does not let the usage in Galatians inform the usage in Romans. He basically agrees that all the other occurrences of the phrase are covenantal and redemptive historical. Romans 6:14 is an exception.

Instead of making Romans 6:14 an exceptional case, I believe we ought to see all the occurrences as fitting the same basic meaning. Paul seems to be using the phrase not to refer to *ordo salutis* concepts like the state of being unregenerate, but in a corporate sense to refer to the legal state of being under obligation to observe the Mosaic covenant, and thus of being liable to the curse of that covenant if we fail to meet the demands of that covenant. It is an objective legal state defining which covenant you are in.

Therefore, to be “under the Law” means to be legally bound by the obligations, conditions, and sanctions of the old covenant, which (according to Paul) is functioning as an extension or republication of the covenantal headship of Adam and his reign of sin and death. The statement that “we are not under the Law but under grace” is a redemptive historical statement of the transition from the old covenant to the new covenant. The people of God are no longer under the legal obligation of keeping the Mosaic covenant and of being subject to its curse.

### Three caveats

This interpretation is defended by Douglas Moo. In his commentary on Romans he adds three qualifications.<sup>14</sup>

First, although “not under law but under grace” is a redemptive historical scheme for the transition from the old covenant to the new, it resists a neat translation into clear-cut temporal categories. For example, there were many OT saints in the legal state of being “under the Law,” who were nevertheless redeemed and who were in a very real sense also “under grace.” Conversely, there are those who lived after the coming of Christ (for instance, many Jewish Christians) who nevertheless lived as if they were “under the Law,” even though the old covenant had been abolished and replaced by the new covenant.

The second caveat is: Although the Mosaic Law is lumped by Paul together with the other powers of the old age – sin, the flesh, and death – nevertheless the Mosaic Law is unique in that it was given by God and thus is not (in and of itself) an intrinsically negative force. Paul makes this very caveat himself in Romans 7:7-13.

Moo’s third caveat is that we must take care to remember that Paul’s strong statements concerning our not being under the Law always refer to the Law as a system, a covenant, the Law as a unit. Therefore,

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<sup>14</sup> Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Eerdmans, 1996), p. 390.

although the Mosaic Law as a covenantal unit has ceased to function as the *direct* and *immediate* standard<sup>15</sup> of conduct for the new covenant people of God, yet the moral will of God was covenantally enshrined in the Mosaic covenant. Thus, God’s moral will remains in force, even though the Mosaic covenant itself does not.

In other words, we are not under the Law as a covenant, but we *are* under grace, and “under grace” must not be so narrowly construed that we think only of that which grace *gives* to the exclusion of what grace *demand*s. Grace is a code-word encapsulating the new covenant as a whole, both the indicative and the imperative. And thus the new covenant church remains under the binding ethical authority of the eternal moral will of God as that will has been revealed in Jesus Christ and the new covenant in his blood. To be specific, being under grace includes the moral obligation to observe all the ethical teachings and commands of Jesus and the apostles as found in the NT.

This interpretation of “under grace” confirms the meaning of “under law.” The two phrases are a pair, and mutually illumine one another. If “under grace” means to be bound by the obligations of the new covenant under the covenantal headship of Jesus Christ, then “under law” means to be bound and obligated to obedience under the Mosaic covenant.

If this is the case, then the point of the contrast between Law and grace is not primarily a contrast of ethical content. The ethical content of the Law and the ethical content of grace overlap to a large extent, since both the old and the new covenants are covenantal enshrinements of God’s eternal moral will. The primary point of the contrast, then, is the contrast of covenantal dynamics. The covenantal dynamic of the Law is “Do this and live.” The covenant dynamic of grace is “You have been justified and made alive in Christ, therefore live in accordance with your new state in Christ.”

## Application

That this is the primary thrust of the verse can be seen from the logical argument that is contained in verse 14. Verse 14 contains two clauses, a and b. You’ve got to meditate on the logic of the verse as a whole if you want to understand the new covenant dynamic of grace.

14a is a conclusion: “Sin shall not be master over you.”

14b is the ground for the conclusion: “For you are not under law but under grace.”

The word “for” indicates that verse 14b supplies the logical ground upon which Paul makes the inference or conclusion stated in 14a. You could flip the two sentences around and replace the word “for” with the word “therefore.”

Premise: “You are not under the Law but under grace.”

Conclusion: “*Therefore* sin shall not be master over you.”

Now this is a revolutionary argument! Remember, for the loyal Jew the Law was seen as God’s gracious provision to deal with sin. A Jew would say that apart from the Law, sin *will* be your master. Paul stands the covenantal dynamic of Judaism on its head. Paul says sin will not be your master, *precisely because* you are not under the Law but under grace. As long as you are under the Law, sin will be your master.

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<sup>15</sup> What do I mean when I say that the Mosaic Law is not the *direct* and *immediate* standard of conduct for the church? This is explained by Kline in *Structure of Biblical Authority*. “The Old Testament, though possessing the general authority of all the Scriptures, does not possess for the church the more specific authority of canonicity” (p. 102).

It’s so counterintuitive, and yet so true. Why is it true that as long as you are under the Law, sin will be your master? Well, remember what we learned in Romans 5. Sin and death are tyrants reigning over fallen humanity on the basis of Adam’s covenant transgression imputed to them. When the Law came, it entered upon the scene, with mankind already enslaved to sin and death. The Law itself is holy and righteous and good, but due to man’s sin, the Law has become part of the problem, indeed a crucial factor in compounding the problem and making it worse.

Why? Because the Law is a covenant of works! It has no power to heal, to forgive, or to transform. It cannot release us from this condition of hopeless slavery. Being a covenant of works that can only demand and threaten judgment upon the slightest failure to meet its demands, the Law has the effect of transforming sins into covenantal transgressions, violations of the covenant.

This is why we must be delivered from the Law if we are going to be delivered from the dominion of sin. The covenantal dynamics of our obedience must be radically changed! So Paul says that the very reason we know that sin shall *not* be master over us is because we are no longer under the Law. Only when the covenant of works is totally fulfilled, totally dealt with by the judicial event of the cross does sin lose its power.

Sin shall not be master over us, because we are not under the Law but under grace. But how did this covenantal transition occur? Deliverance from the Law as a covenant of works, and our having been brought under the sway of a new authority, the authority of grace – these things are not events that took place in the recesses of my inner spiritual being, but public events that occurred on the stage of world history.

This is brought out clearly in Romans 6:1-7. Paul appeals to the transfer of covenantal headship established in Romans 5:12-21. Since both sin and Law are part of the reign of the first Adam, we are delivered from both of these powers of the old age by means of union with Christ as our second Adam. By virtue of our being represented by him as our second Adam, we are no longer under the control and sway of sin and the Law. That is why Paul draws our attention to the death of Christ as the moment when the decisive break occurred, because the death of Christ was a judicial covenant transfer. On the cross, God executed his wrath and covenantal judgment upon sin. The claims of the Law were satisfied, so that we are no longer under its jurisdiction.

But Paul does not stop there. He never leaves us there in the grave with Christ. Having been severed from the powers that dominated us in the old age, Paul immediately goes on to show that if we have been united with Christ in his death, we are also united with him in his resurrection. And therefore we are not merely freed from the old age. For the very mechanism that delivered us – the judicial action of God whereby he judged sin upon the cross and raised Christ from the dead – is the same judicial action by which we have been transferred to a new realm, a new dominion.

The historical events of the cross and resurrection are the key to understanding why it is that not being under the Law and being transferred to the realm of grace do not lead to license, but in fact lead to just the opposite. Sin is not our master, because we are united to Christ, to the one who was crucified but is now risen and exalted at God’s right hand. There is no third option. There is no neutral state where we are free from the lordship of some covenant head. To be delivered from slavery to sin, means to be enslaved to righteousness. To be delivered from our previous marriage to the Law, means to be married to another husband, even Jesus himself. The covenantal death sanction is followed by the covenantal life sanction. And both occur through union with Christ. Therefore, we have an obligation, by virtue of our union with Christ in his death and resurrection, to live in accordance with our new state, under the gracious lordship of our new covenant head. To be “under grace,” then, means to be under the covenantal lordship of Jesus Christ.

The thing that is so brilliant about Paul’s strategy here is that this awesome covenantal transition statement in 6:14 is the conclusive answer to the objection, “Shall we continue in sin that grace may

abound?” Paul says that being under the sway of free grace is so far from leading us into greater sin, it is in fact the very thing that God, in the paradox of his grace, has used to kill the dominion of sin in our lives!

Thanks be to God that we have been transferred from the headship of Adam to the headship of Christ, from the old covenant to the new, from Law to grace! Thanks be to God that having been transferred to the new realm and authority of grace, God has thereby put a decisive end to the dominion of sin. For by union with Christ in his death, you have been delivered from the Law, and are now under the sweet constraint of grace empowering you to a new and higher obedience!

**Sermon 5:  
But If Her Husband Dies**  
2-24-02

This morning we come to the text that inspired the title of this series, Romans 7:1-6. In the first two sermons we dealt with introductory matters, focusing particularly on the meaning of *nomos* in Paul. In the third and fourth sermons we began to set the context by looking at Paul’s teaching on the Law in Romans 5 and 6. We saw that Paul’s references to the Law in Romans 5, 6, and 7 are three links in a chain. The first link in the chain was Rom. 5:20, “the Law came in so that the trespass might increase.” The Law is part of the problem, not the solution. It was added in order to turn sins into covenant transgressions, thus sealing man’s enslavement under the reign of sin and death inaugurated by Adam.

In our fourth sermon in the series, we looked at the second link in the chain – Rom. 6:14: “Sin shall not be your master, for you are not under the Law but under grace.” We saw that “under the Law” means to be legally bound by the obligations, conditions, and sanctions of the Mosaic Law as a covenant. Paul says that we are no longer under the Mosaic covenant. We have been transferred to a new legal authority. We are now bound by the new covenant. We are under grace.

We come this morning, then, to Romans 7, the passage that we really want to camp out at and dig into in depth. Lord willing we’ll also continue through the rest of chapter 7, and hopefully shed some light on the controversial question of who is the “I” in that passage. But all that in due course. For now, we want to chew on the opening six verses for a while and savor all the rich juices of the wonderful top sirloin that Paul is serving up in this marvelous text.

Romans 7:1-6: Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives? 2 For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. 3 So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man. 4 Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. 5 For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were *aroused* by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. 6 But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.

As we begin looking at the first paragraph here in vv. 1-6, notice that it begins with a common Pauline question, “Or do you not know ... ?” This clearly links back to 6:14. In other words, 7:1-6 is going to exposit the rather compressed statement in 6:14. This should tip us off right at the outset to expect that 7:1-6 is going to be making basically the same point as 6:14, although it will go into the matter more deeply.

Just notice the basic parallel in thought between 6:14 and 7:5-6. In both Paul is emphatically proclaiming the glorious truth of our deliverance from the covenant of works. (“Not under the Law” ... “released from the Law.”) Furthermore, this deliverance from the Law is the very thing by which we know that sin’s dominion has been severed. Precisely because we are delivered from the Law as a conditional covenant, and are now under the sweet constraint of grace – that, Paul says, is why sin shall not be master over us. As long as we are under the Law, sin will be master.

Verses 5-6: For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were *aroused* by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. 6 But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.

Trying to serve God under the Law is like throwing oil on the fire. It just inflames our sinful desires even more. The only means by which we can grow in sanctification, obedience, and holiness, is not by trying harder to keep the Law, but by being delivered from the Law and laying hold of our new state in Christ as those who are under the reign of free grace.

### The marriage analogy

Up until this point, I have been explaining the marriage analogy in Romans 7:1-6 as follows: (1) the wife corresponds to the Christian; (2) the first husband stands for the Mosaic Law; and (3) the second husband is Christ. I still agree with (1) and (3). The question is whether the first husband stands for the Mosaic Law (2).

The problem with this interpretation is that it breaks down when Paul applies the analogy in verse 4. In verse 4, it is the believer who dies, whereas in the analogy it was the husband who died, not the wife. Many commentators have scratched their heads at this point. Some think Paul was simply confused and couldn't keep his analogy straight. Calvin argues that Paul didn't want to offend the Jews by saying that the Law itself died, so he softened it by saying that we died to the Law.<sup>16</sup>

Probably the most commonly held view is that the reference to marriage was never intended to function as a comprehensive analogy with detailed correspondences between the analogy and its application, but merely to illustrate the general truth that death removes legal obligations. On this view, then, it doesn't really matter whether it's the husband or the wife who dies – it comes to the same thing in the end: just as a marriage bond is concluded by the death of one of the spouses, so our legal obligations to the Mosaic Law have been concluded by union with Christ in his death.

This was the solution that I started out with as I began this series. But during the week, as I spent hours poring over the text in the original Greek, consulted commentaries, read a couple of journal articles<sup>17</sup> – I came to the conclusion that this interpretation is incorrect.

The reason I changed my view is because of a grammatical problem in verse 4. Paul says, “Therefore, my brethren, you *also* were made to die to the Law.” The little word “also” (*kai*) is the root of the whole problem.<sup>18</sup> Is Paul saying, “You also, like the husband in the previous analogy, have been made to die to the Law”? That makes no sense, because he likens us to the wife, who is now free from the jurisdiction of the Law and is thus free to marry another man. As strange as it sounds, Paul clearly seems to be saying, “You also, like the wife in the preceding analogy, have been made to die to the Law.”

The problem is, in the analogy the wife did not die to the Law – *or did she?* In a legal sense, she did! She died representatively in union with her husband. Since her husband mediates the Law's authority to her, when *he* dies, *she* dies. His death constitutes the severing of the legal bond not only for himself, but on behalf of his wife, whose legal status is determined by that of the husband.

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<sup>16</sup> “That he might not offend the Jews by the asperity of his expressions, had he said that the law was dead, he adopted a digression, and said, that we are dead to the law.” John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, translated by the Calvin Translation Society (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), p. 245.

<sup>17</sup> Joyce A. Little, “Paul's Use of Analogy: A Structural Analysis of Romans 7:1-6,” *CBQ* 46 (Jan. 1984) 82-90; John D. Earnshaw, “Reconsidering Paul's Marriage Analogy in Romans 7.1-6,” *NTS* 40 (1994) 68-88. I am not in complete agreement with either article, although Earnshaw's influenced me the most.

<sup>18</sup> “That which indicates the idea of comparison here is the following word *kai*; indeed, in certain contexts the meaning of *kai* cannot be distinguished from the sense conveyed by *houtos*.” Earnshaw, p. 70.

It is imperative that we not rush past verse 1 in our eagerness to figure out the details of the marriage analogy. Verse 1 is actually the primary principle undergirding the whole passage, and the analogy of marriage that Paul develops in verses 2 and 3 simply builds on the first.

What is the primary principle? It is that the law has jurisdiction over a person only for as long as he is alive. This would of course be true of any law in general, but Paul lays down this principle with regard to the Mosaic Law in particular. The implication is clear. Death removes one from the jurisdiction of the Law.

In verses 2 and 3, Paul is not switching gears, as if the principle in verse 1 has now been tossed aside as he searches for a better analogy. Evidence of the fact that verse 2 is a continuation of verse 1 is the fact that Paul uses the very significant word “for” (*gar* in Greek). In normal usage, when you see a *gar* at the beginning of a sentence, that is a signal to the reader that what follows is an argument for what has preceded. It is not a new argument, or a new line of thought, but a continuation of what went before, elaborating on it, and giving reasons for it.

What that means, then, is that the general principle enunciated in verse 1, that the Law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he is alive, is not being set to the side. If we view verse 2 as building on verse 1, rather than replacing it, then what Paul is saying is that the Law has jurisdiction over the *husband* as long as the husband lives. As soon as the husband dies, the Law ceases to have jurisdiction over him.

How does the wife fit into this? The wife is also under the Law’s jurisdiction, but not directly. The Law’s jurisdiction over the wife is mediated through the authority of the husband who is the head of the wife. This point is actually crystal clear in Greek. The problem is that the English translations describe the woman as “a married woman,” when in fact the Greek literally says “the woman who is under a man.” It’s the Greek word *hupandros*. It comes from two words, *hupo*, which means to be “under the authority or power of someone or something,” and *andros*, usually translated “husband.” The married woman is under the authority of the husband. And since the husband is under the Law, the wife is also under the Law, mediated by the husband.

A word of caution. Paul isn’t saying that women in the old covenant had no obligation or responsibility to keep the Law directly in their own right. They surely did. There are a number of stipulations in the Torah that are directed specifically to women, things having to do with menstruation and purity laws and so forth. Paul isn’t denying that wives in the old covenant were moral beings with their own moral and spiritual obligations to God.

In verse 3, Paul explains what he means when he says that the woman is under the Law through the husband. In verse 3, Paul singles out the seventh commandment, “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” He says that if the wife is joined to another man while her husband is still alive, then she will be called an adulteress. The seventh commandment of the Law comes down and brands her as an adulteress. Why? Because she is married, she is under the authority of her first husband. But if her first husband dies, she will no longer be called an adulteress, even though she is joined to another man. Once her first husband passes away, the seventh commandment can’t brand her as an adulteress.

The main thought of verses 2 and 3, then, is simply this. The Law (or the seventh commandment) reaches the wife through the husband. Therefore, if the husband dies, the chain of command is broken, and the wife is free. The death of the husband therefore constitutes the release of the woman from the authority of the Law.

Furthermore, Paul goes on to say in verse 3, the death of the husband is the key issue determining whether the wife is can be legally joined to another man. If she is joined to another man while her first husband is still alive, she is still under the chain of command that reaches to the very top, where the Law is

sitting there ready to judge her and accuse her of adultery. But if the first husband dies, then the chain of command is broken, the Law cannot judge her, and so she will not be called an adulteress even if she is joined to another man.

I'd like to pause right here and draw out a wonderful application from this reference to the Law's ability to “call” someone “an adulteress.” Have you ever noticed that in the sin lists in the New Testament, the various sins are described not as deeds but as persons? This is one of the things that the Law does. It doesn't just tell you that you've sinned. It goes further and labels you as a person. It calls you names.

1 Timothy 1:6-11: For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, 7 wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions. 8 But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, 9 realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers 10 and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching, 11 according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted.

Paul says the Law is not made for the righteous person – it's not made for the person who is righteous in God's sight, who is justified, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to him. The Law is for the unrighteous. And then Paul begins to enumerate the various kinds of unrighteous people that the Law is for. It is for those who kill their fathers and mothers, it is for murderers, immoral men, homosexuals, kidnappers, etc. Those who are outside of Christ, who are not clothed in his righteousness, they are defined by the Law – as to their very identity, their persons – as law-breakers, as sinners. The Law has the function of labeling them. “You're a daddy killer! You're a mommy killer! You're a no-good loser pervert!” It doesn't distinguish between the sin and the sinner. It lumps the two together and says, “If you have sinned, then that sin defines who you are,” and the Law proceeds to slap a big letter A on your forehead, defining you as that which you are at the very core of your being.

Oh how wonderful, then, it is when we come to a passage like 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, and we read a very similar list of sinners, but this time followed by the word, “But such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.” Don't lose the point of what Paul is saying here! Don't think that “such were some of you” means that some of the Corinthians used to commit those sins, but now, because of regeneration and progressive sanctification, they no longer have any struggles, or that they are making such tremendous progress in mortifying sin that they are pretty much not sinners any more. Not for a moment! These very sins may yet be something that you wrestle with as a Christian, but the glorious liberty of the sons of God is that you are not under the Law, and so even though you may deal with those sins even now, you are NOT labeled by the Law. You may wrestle with same-sex attraction, but you are not labeled as a homosexual in the sight of God! That is what you were, when you were under the Law. Now you are washed, you are sanctified, you are justified in Christ – that is your true and most basic identity. In Christ, the old things have passed away; behold, everything has become new!

### **Summary of the argument so far**

Let's return to Romans 7:1-6 and review Paul's argument thus far. You see what Paul has done. He is advancing his argument step by step. In verse 1, you've got a law, and you've got a person who is under its jurisdiction. Then the person dies, and the jurisdiction of the Law over that person ends.

Then, in verse 2, Paul says, let's extend the analogy by introducing an additional factor. Let's say that the person in verse 1 is a husband, and he has a wife who is under his jurisdiction. The principle of verse 1 is applied to the husband. If the husband dies, the jurisdiction of the law ceases to function over

him. But since the wife is under the jurisdiction of the law in and through her husband, the death of the husband logically frees her as well.

Verse 3. Paul brings yet another character into the picture – husband # 2. As long as husband # 1 is still alive, the wife is not free to be joined to husband # 2. But if husband # 1 dies, she is free. Why does Paul add husband # 2? He wants to show how significant the death of husband # 1 really is in terms of her legal situation. In effect, she is doing the exact same thing in both cases – she’s living with someone other than her husband. But the death of husband # 1 totally changes her legal status, from being an adulteress to being not an adulteress. The law can’t touch her now that husband # 1 is dead.

Having added husband # 2 into the picture, Paul has placed the soft pitch right over the plate, thus setting himself up to hit the ball out of the park in verse 4: “Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.” The key phrase is “you have been made to die *through the body of Christ*.” It is not that we ourselves died. It is that Christ, our husband, has died under the Law in our place, thus causing us to be reckoned as dead to the Law in him and thus released from the Law’s jurisdiction.

The really great thing about the cross, the thing that ought to make you really excited is not that you *don’t have* to die, but that you *have* died! You have been made to die to the Law through the body of Christ. The only way you can be delivered from the Law is through death. “Do you not know that the Law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives?” Thanks be to God that you have been made to die to the Law in union with Christ!

This fact of our having been judicially made to die to the Law in union with Christ’s death clearly demonstrates that for Paul the Law was a covenant of works. Christ was born under the Law, taking our place under its jurisdiction. His death under the Law was a judicial event of immense significance, for by means of his death, all who are united to Christ by faith, are done with the Law. Its claims have been satisfied. It no longer exercises jurisdiction over us. It can’t tell us what to do. It can’t threaten us with a penalty if he fail. It is silenced. Therefore, we are free to serve God in union with Christ.

## Application

What does this wonderful truth of our death to the Law mean? It means two things.

First, no more labeling. The Law can’t call you names! Even though you may still commit certain sins, the Law can’t identify you with those sins and call you an adulteress. That’s what Paul says in verse 3: “So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man.” She was joined to another man while her first husband was still alive. At that time, she was labeled an adulteress. Then, without any change taking place in her circumstances, the mere fact that her first husband passed away, instantly released her from the Law’s jurisdiction. It can’t label her now. Now she is “no longer called an adulteress *though she is joined to another man*.”

Second, no more penalty. The Law can’t punish you. There’s an interesting passage in Hebrews 2:2 which captures the terrifying reality of what it was like to live under the Mosaic Law. “Every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty.” The wonderful truth is, you have already received the just penalty in Christ. You are therefore dead to the Law. It can’t touch you any more.

Doesn’t this lead to license for sin? If we take away these restraints – no more labeling, no more penalty – won’t Christians think they can sin and get away with it? Well, first of all, remember Paul’s distinction between sin and transgression in Romans 5:13. Transgression is sin that occurs under a covenant of works. Since you are released from the Law as a covenant of works, there is no more transgression.

“Where there is no Law, there is no violation” (Rom. 4:15). But sin is still sin. It’s still contrary to God’s holy character and will for your life.

However, since sin is not transgression – no labeling, no penalty – you’ve got to fight against sin for other reasons now. Instead of avoiding sin and pursuing sanctification in order to avoid the shame of being labeled, or to avoid the penalty – you’ve got to grow up! Instead of being motivated by such self-centered motives, you are now called to obey simply because obedience is the right thing to do, and because the fruit is better! Notice how Paul in our passage contrasts the two “fruits” in verses 4 and 5. The fruit of sin is death. The fruit of righteousness is pleasing to God. In the preceding chapter Paul asked, “What benefit (literally, fruit) were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed?” (Rom. 6:21). Paul is saying, Think about what it was like when you were in the flesh. Was it any good? Did you really enjoy it?<sup>19</sup> No, the outcome of those things was death. By contrast, having now been freed from sin and become enslaved to God, you are enjoying the fruit of sanctification (Rom. 6:22)! Why should you avoid sin and pursue obedience? Because the fruit of serving God is far more satisfying than the fruit of sin, which is death. As one whose heart has been renewed by grace, you don’t really like to sin anyway!

You see Paul wants us to become mature sons. We aren’t children anymore who need to be threatened with punishment in order to motivate us to do what is right. We’re grown adults now. We now understand what God’s will is, and we know it’s right and good for us, and that our true nature longs to serve God rather than sin. This is what it means, then, to serve God in the new covenant way of the Spirit rather than in the old covenant way of the letter. You are not a Jew under the Law needing an external code to serve as a bit and bridle to keep you on the right path. You are a son, who wants to obey God because by sovereign grace you have been made alive and now you love God and his holy will. You want to follow God’s will because it is intrinsically right.

You are not under law but under grace. The contrast between the old and new covenants, between Law and grace, is not primarily in the area of ethical requirements. Although the unique stipulations given to Israel as a theocracy, with an earthly temple, have been abrogated, the stipulations that were rooted in the eternal moral will of God have been reissued in the new covenant as part of the imperatives that flow from the indicative of our union with Christ.

Rather than being fundamentally a contrast of ethical norms, the Law-grace contrast of Rom. 6:14 is a contrast of covenantal dynamics. Christians are not bound to God’s moral will via the covenantal dynamics of the Law, which was a conditional covenant, a covenant that threatened a curse upon Law-breakers. We are bound, in Christ, to God’s moral will via the new covenantal dynamics of grace. Under Law, your actions are the ground of God’s favor or disfavor. Under grace, God’s unconditional favor, guaranteed to us by Christ’s merit, is the ground of our actions. We do not obey in order to be accepted. We are accepted in order that we might obey. Under Law, obedience is the condition of blessing, and so the blessing can be lost. Under grace, obedience is the result of the fact that we *have been* blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, which blessings can never be lost.

In heaven, when you are free from all sin, you will not have an external code dictating what you should and shouldn’t do. You’ll obey because your whole being will have been totally renewed and transformed into the image of Christ. Not even for a moment will you think about sin, because you will be drinking from the streams of living water. Your spiritual taste buds will be so saturated with God’s holiness and love and light that you will desire nothing else. Let us begin to love God’s holiness and glory without external constraint even now.

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<sup>19</sup> Paul’s appeal to the dissatisfying results of sin is also found in the OT. E.g., Isaiah 55:2-3 “Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and delight yourself in abundance. Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live.” Jeremiah 2:13: “For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water.”

**Sermon 6:  
Made to Die to the Law  
3-3-02**

Last week we began digging into Romans 7, focusing our attention on the marriage analogy in the first six verses. We saw that there is a problem about how exactly we are supposed to understand the analogy and its application to the believer’s relationship to the Mosaic Law.

The initial interpretation with which I began the series was the view that the first husband is the Law, the wife is the believer, and the second husband is Christ who takes the place of the Law as the believer’s husband. The problem with this view is that in the analogy it is the first husband (*ex hypothesi*, the Law) who dies, whereas in the application it is the believer who dies to the Law. This begs the question. Why didn’t Paul keep the parallels lined up correctly? Why didn’t he set up the analogy in such a manner that the person who dies in the analogy meshes with the person who dies in the application?

Let’s pause and reflect for a moment on that. Paul could have done one of two things. The first way he could have made the analogy fit better would have been to keep the application that it is the believer who dies to the Law, but instead of the husband being the one who dies in the analogy, he could have said that the wife dies, thus severing the marriage bond.

But would that have really worked? If the wife is the one who dies, then she is dead, and isn’t able to be joined to another man. But this feature of the analogy is a crucial element of the analogy. When you look at the application in verse 4, Paul wants to be able say that because of death, we are free to be joined to another, even to him who was raised from the dead, in order to bring forth fruit unto God. Paul’s purpose in using the analogy from marriage in vv. 2-3 isn’t to merely demonstrate that death severs the marriage bond. The possibility of entering legally into a new marriage relationship is also an essential part of the analogy. Paul doesn’t just want to say that death releases us from the jurisdiction of the Law, and leave it at that, as if we are now free from all ethical authority in our lives. That would be antinomianism. Paul wants to be able to go on to argue that by means of Christ’s death we have been severed from the Law, and by means of his resurrection we have been joined to another husband, to whom we are now bound in the bonds of the new covenant order of life in union with Jesus Christ.

So the first option is ruled out. Paul couldn’t make the analogy work by having the wife die. What about the other option? Could Paul have kept the husband as the one who dies in the analogy, and then reworked the application along the lines suggested by Calvin? Calvin said that what Paul was really wanting to say is that the first husband stands for the Law, and when the first husband dies, that is, when the Law died at the cross, the believer is now released from marriage to the Law and is free to be married to Christ. The reason Paul didn’t follow through with his analogy consistently was not because he didn’t believe that the Law had died, but to be sensitive to the Jews who might have been offended if he had said that the Law was dead.

This approach is an improvement. It fits the application quite well. Furthermore, there is nothing wrong with the statement that the Mosaic Law died at Calvary. There are a couple of passages in Paul where seems to say just that. For example, in Ephesians 2:15 Paul says that Christ abolished in his flesh the enmity, that is, the Law of commandments contained in ordinances. So he has defined the Mosaic Law as “the enmity.” The Law is “the enmity” because it is against us. It identifies our transgressions, and condemns us to death. Then, in verse 16, having said that the Law is “the enmity,” Paul restates what he said in verse 15, but this time he says “... and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it [the cross] having put to death *the enmity* [= the Law].” Here is a fairly strong statement saying that Christ put the Law to death by his cross.

Then there’s Colossians 2:14 where Paul says quite bluntly that Christ took “the handwritten document consisting of decrees that were against us [= the Law] out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.” The Law itself was crucified with Christ, according to Paul.

So Calvin’s interpretation that the husband is the Law is certainly compatible with Paul’s teaching elsewhere. But this very evidence works against Calvin’s argument. In Ephesians and Colossians Paul had no qualms saying that the Law died. So why would Paul feel the need to hedge his comments here in Romans? In the first four chapters of Romans, you don’t come away with the impression that Paul was terribly concerned to appease the Jews and their boast in the Law. He seemed to be quite eager to offend them at precisely this point (e.g., Rom. 2:23; 3:27; 4:13).

Much better, then, to take Paul at face value. He knew what he was doing when he set up the analogy of marriage, and had the husband be the one who dies. It all fits together when you realize that in verse 4 Paul does not say that *we have died to the Law*, but that *we been made to die through the body of Christ*.

Two things stand out here. First, the verb Paul uses for our death is not *apothnesko* but *thanatoo*. *Apothnesko* means to die, to pass away. It is a colorless verb that is neutral about the means of death. A person whose death is described with the verb *apothnesko* might have simply passed away of natural causes. This is the verb he used twice in the analogy when he says “but if her husband dies.” But in v. 4, when we come to the application of the analogy, Paul does not say that we have *apothnesko*-ed – just up and died. He says we have been *thanatoo*-ed. We have been *put* to death, we have been *made* to die. We have been condemned to death and handed over to legal execution. This verb *thanatoo*, to be put to death, is not a verb Paul would have chosen by accident. It’s not just another synonym for death. It is the same verb that is used in the gospel accounts for the execution of Christ. Jesus was put to death by the Romans at the request of the Jewish sanhedrin who formally condemned him to death for blasphemy.<sup>20</sup>

Second, Paul adds, “we have been put to death through the body of Christ.” We were not put to death in our own persons. We have been put to death in union with one who was put to death for us, so that his death as our covenant head becomes our death. Because he represented us on the cross, and because we were united to him judicially and covenantally, the judicial death of Christ to the Law constitutes our judicial death to the Law.

Putting these two things together, we have a weighty theological statement: “We have been judicially condemned and executed, not in our own person, but by means of our covenantal union with Christ our covenant head who was put to death on our behalf.” This is more than the idea of substitution. It is more than the idea of being on death row, and then some nice person comes along and says, “Hey look, I’ll take your place. I’ll die for you, so that you can go free.” It is the idea of covenantal solidarity. Our identification with Christ is such that *his* death is *our* death. That is why Paul says in Rom. 6:5 that we have been united with him in the likeness of his death, and again in v. 6 that our old man was co-crucified with him. In v. 7 he then says, “for he who has died is freed from sin.” All that Paul says in chapter 6 about our death to sin in union with Christ’s death to sin he now applies here in chapter 7 to the Law in union with Christ’s death to the Law.

You see, then, that Paul’s use of the marriage analogy is totally consistent. The death of the first husband prepares the way for the death of Christ to the Law.<sup>21</sup> The Law and the first husband then cannot be

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<sup>20</sup> According to BAGD, *Greek-English Lexicon* (second revised ed.), *apothnesko* is normally used “of natural death,” whereas *thanatoo* means “to hand someone over to be killed, esp. of the death sentence and its execution.”

<sup>21</sup> “Paul’s marriage analogy is properly understood only when the wife’s first marriage is viewed as illustrating the believer’s union with Christ in his death and her second marriage is viewed as illustrating the believer’s union with Christ in his resurrection.” Earnshaw, p. 72.

the same. For if Christ died to the Law, then he had to be born under it first. He had to take the position of the first husband under the Law.

### **The first husband as fallen Adam**

This interpretation raises an obvious question. Who, then, is the first husband? It is Adam, not in the state of innocence, but Adam as fallen, Adam as the disobedient covenant head who plunged all of us into the state of sin, so that we are all born sinners, born condemned and on the way to hell. You can see that the first husband is Adam when you look at verse 5: “For while we were *in the flesh*, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death.”<sup>22</sup>

Return now to verse 1, this time keeping in mind that the first husband is Adam. The Law (or, better, the covenant of works) has jurisdiction over fallen Adam as long as Adam lives. But Adam is not alone under this covenant of works. Adam is a covenant head and thus those whom he represents are likened to a man’s wife. We saw last week that the first sentence in verse 2 should be translated, “The under-a-man (*hupandros*) woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living.” As long as we are under the covenant headship of Adam, we are under the jurisdiction of the covenant of works, because Adam is under the jurisdiction of the covenant, and we stand in that covenant in Adam.

Let’s pause for a moment and reflect on this our situation under the covenant headship of fallen Adam. To begin with all of humanity descending from Adam by ordinary generation, is born with original sin. What is original sin?

Shorter Catechism question # 18: “*Wherein consist the sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell?*” Answer: The sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell, consists in the guilt of Adam’s first sin, the want of original righteousness, and the corruption of his whole nature, which is commonly called original sin; together with all actual transgressions which proceed from it.”

Original sin is both imputed and inherited. In other words, not only is the guilt of Adam’s sin imputed, but we also inherit Adam’s sinful nature, a nature that is corrupt and enslaved to sin. As a result of original sin (both imputed and inherited), notice what the Catechism says: “together with all actual transgressions which proceed from it [i.e., from original sin].” In verse 5, when Paul describes us “when we were in the flesh” he is talking about that state of sin, imputed and inherited from Adam.

Now what happens when the Mosaic Law enters in? Recall Romans 5:20, “The Mosaic Law came in so that the trespass would increase.” The trespass here is Adam’s one trespass. When the Law enters into the situation of fallen Adamic humanity under the dominion of sin and death, what happens? Paul says explicitly in 7:5 that “The sinful passions are aroused by the Law.” In the next paragraph, vv. 7-25, Paul fleshes this out in more detail.

Romans 7:7-13: What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, “You shall not covet.” 8 But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin *is* dead. 9 I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; 10 and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; 11 for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. 12 So

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<sup>22</sup> While I agree with Earnshaw that the *death* of the first husband represents the death of Christ, I want to argue that the first husband is actually our first covenant head, Adam in the fallen status of covenant transgression and failure, subject to the curse sanction of death. Christ assumes Adam’s place as covenant head by his incarnation when he took upon himself “the likeness of the flesh of sin” (Rom. 8:3).

then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. 13 Therefore did that which is good become *a cause of death* for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.

It's bad enough that we have fallen Adam as our covenant head, or to use the analogy of marriage, as our husband. When the Law comes into the picture, the situation goes from bad to worse. In a sense, the Law was always in the picture from the beginning, not in the Mosaic form, but as the original covenant of works made with Adam in the garden. But when the Mosaic form of the covenant of works enters the picture, we relate to it in Adam, or (to use Paul's language), "in the flesh" (v. 5). We do not relate to the Mosaic Law as innocent, as sinless – but as already guilty and condemned in Adam.

Furthermore, not only are we imputed as sinners in Adam, we also inherited Adam's sinful and corrupt and rebellious nature. And so when the Mosaic Law confronts us with its demands, and says, "You shall not covet," what happens? We immediately start thinking about coveting. The Law forbids us to have certain sinful desires. And so what happens? We start having those very sinful desires that the Law prohibited!

And then the Law does precisely what it is supposed to do. It pronounces a dreadful curse of death upon us. Having violated its holy precepts, we who were already dead in sin, are now handed over to die under the wrath of God as expressed in his Law. And this, in turn, makes us want to sin even more. For now we hate God's Law because it demands of us something we cannot perform, and then it pronounces a curse upon us. What's the point of trying to obey this inflexible taskmaster that's always standing over you, ready to whip and flog you to death for every infraction? The Law binds you hand and foot, and then commands you to do more work. And so, as Paul says, the sinful passions, aroused by the Law, are at work in our members, and we brought forth, not the fruit of righteousness and life, but the bitter fruit of death.

Clearly, we must escape this state of being trapped under the power of sin and the Law. We've got to get out from under the Law. But if we leave our original covenant head, Adam, and are joined to another covenant head while the first covenant head is still living, what will happen? We will be considered covenant breakers, adulteresses, by that very Law! Since our first covenant head is still living, we are still under the original covenant of works. If we seek to extricate ourselves from that covenant by simply placing ourselves under a new covenant head without first making sure we are squared away with the first covenant, then we are reckoned as covenant breakers – adulteresses.

That is why Christ had to become man, taking upon himself the likeness of sinful flesh. He had to identify himself with our hopeless and fallen situation under the original covenant of works. Or, to use the language of redemptive historical legibility, he had to be made under the Mosaic Law, which was a republication of the original Adamic covenant. Thus, Christ took Adam's place under the original covenant, as our representative. Through his obedience to the point of death, Christ as the second Adam fully discharged our legal obligations to the original covenant. Christ not only kept the Law perfectly, obeying it in our place, most importantly, he effected a total break with that former covenant by being put to death under it. By means of death, he released us from the covenant. "The Law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives." "He who has died is freed from sin." The legal claims of the original covenant have been fulfilled, exhausted. The Law has now spent itself upon Christ. It has vented the fullness of its curse and fury and wrath upon Christ. Since he had taken our place under the covenant, fulfilled its demands and was judicially handed over to death under it – all of that is now reckoned to our account. And so we are now "cool" with the covenant of works.

It's like a person who wants to transfer his membership to another congregation. In this day and age, of course, this is rarely done. But what's supposed to happen is that the elders of the receiving congregation are supposed to communicate with the elders of the dismissing congregation to make sure there are no outstanding discipline issues that need to be resolved. If the original session says, "He's a

member in good standing,” fine, the guy can be received into the new congregation, no problem. But if the original session says, “Well, he’s actually under church discipline, he’s been suspended from the Lord’s Supper for this or that reason, and he’s trying to flee church discipline,” then the elders of the new congregation have an obligation to tell the guy to go back and make things right with his original session.

It’s the same thing here – although I hope you realize that we can’t press the illustration too far, and say that sessions ought to function like the covenant of works! My point is that a person’s legal status before the original court has to be resolved to the satisfaction of the original court, before placing himself under another court of jurisdiction. That’s what the death of Christ does for us. He squares up our accounts with the original Adamic covenant. He releases us from that covenant by taking Adam’s place as our second Adam who obeys where Adam failed to obey, and who brings a complete end to our obligation to that covenant by means of his death on the cross. That covenant can no longer subpoena us and call us back under its jurisdiction. As far as that covenant is concerned, it thinks we’re as good as dead. We’re not even on the radar screen anymore. It’s not as if our slate has been wiped clean, and now that we’ve become saved, we have a chance to do better this time around under that covenant. When the judge does a computer search for our rap sheet, up pops this message that says, “This particular criminal was sentenced to death row and executed by means of Roman crucifixion on Good Friday in the year 30 A.D.” Case closed. That’s it. You’re through. And so the files are deleted, and the judge of the covenant of works can move on to bringing other criminals to justice.

Returning to the text – verse 6. The English Standard Version reads: “But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.”

“We are released from the law” – notice the parallel with the analogy in verse 2 (“she is released from the Law of the husband”) and verse 3 (“she is free from the Law”). The death of the husband leads to the release of the wife, and her release is not merely a release from her husband, but from the Law under which she stood on account of her marriage to the husband. The death of Christ as the second Adam was the judicial execution of the first Adam. Therefore, we who were under Adam are now released from the Law or covenant of works that the first Adam stood under.

“We have died to that which held us captive.” The Law held us captive. Because our obligation to the Law was mediated by our covenantal relationship to the Law in *fallen* Adam, we were not only bound to the Law, we were depraved sinners held captive by the Law. This captivity under the Law included our obligation to its demands, our inability as sinners to keep those demands, together with our being held under the unrelenting vice-grip of the curse of the Law. The more we sinned, the more we were accursed, and the more we were accursed the more we sinned. We were prisoners, held captive by the Law, bound hand and foot to be handed over to eternal wrath.

Romans 7:23-25a: But I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Now that we are released from the Law through death, that is, in union with Christ’s death, we are freed from our captivity to sin and condemnation. The Law can no longer arouse our sinful passions and bring forth the fruit of death. We are married to another, to Jesus Christ, the second Adam.

### **Application**

Jesus himself was born under the Law, and died to the Law. Furthermore, he was raised again, outside of the Law. Thus, our marriage to Christ does not put us back under the Law. Jesus is not alive to the Law, but to God.

Romans 6:10 For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He *lives to God*. 11 Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but *alive to God* in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 2:19 For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might *live to God*.

Just as Jesus died to the Law and is now alive to God, so we in union with him have died to the Law and are now alive to God. Therefore, we must reckon ourselves to be dead to sin and alive unto God. Just as Paul exhorts us to consider ourselves to be dead to sin, so he exhorts us to consider ourselves to be dead to the Law and alive unto God.

It is a fact. The great transition in redemptive history from the old covenant to the new has already occurred in the death and resurrection of Christ. Christ was born under the Law, died to the Law, and is now alive apart from the Law unto God. It is objectively true, then, that you are dead to the Law as well. It's even true for legalistic Christians who think that they're under it!

Paul says in Romans 8:15 that we have not received a spirit of slavery *again* unto fear, but the Spirit of adoption as sons. That is an objective reality. The spirit of slavery that characterized the Mosaic economy is over. The Spirit of adoption as sons was poured out on the day of Pentecost and reigns over all the sons of God. And yet it is possible for the sons of God to not appreciate their status as sons, their status as those who are no longer under the disciplinarian of the Law that God gave to be the custodian of his people in their spiritual childhood. When we were children we needed the Law to spank us and correct us and guide us in the right path. But we're not children any more. We're sons. And yet it is possible for sons to forget that and to revert back to childhood again. That is why Paul says we have not received a spirit of slavery *again*. He is warning us against the danger of going back to the weak and beggarly principles of the Mosaic Law.

That is why we must consider ourselves, by faith, to be dead to the Law. And you say, But how? It doesn't feel like I'm dead to the Law! My own conscience keeps accusing me and condemning me. I feel like I'm still under it. There is only one way to respond to those feelings. You must respond to them by looking at Christ. Ask yourself: Is Christ still under the Law? God forbid! He died to it! It's a done deal. He's not only dead to it, but he's been raised out from under it, and is now alive to God! In heaven right now, do you think Jesus is looking to the Law to direct him, as if he were a child needing to be told what to do, as if he needed to be warned not to sin?

We are like the slaves after Lincoln signed the Emancipation proclamation in 1865. They were legally and judicially free. In the sight of the law of the land, they were not slaves, they were released from bondage. And yet they still felt that they were slaves. They had grown up on the plantation, and they had become so accustomed to thinking and acting and being treated like slaves, they couldn't just walk away as free men and women. They still looked at white people as if they were masters. The physical chains were gone. But the psychological chains took years and generations to wither away.

We are much better off than the emancipated slaves. For each one of us has been given a copy of the Emancipation Proclamation right here in God's Word, and we have the Spirit of the risen Christ, the Spirit of adoption, dwelling in our hearts to make the words of our Emancipation Proclamation come home to our heart and our conscience, so that we not only believe that we are free, but that we might feel and enjoy our freedom. As Calvin said, "The heart's distrust is greater than the mind's blindness" (*Institutes* III.ii.36). Our distrustful hearts are timid and afraid to step off the plantation. We're afraid we'll get whacked by the Law again, arrested and sent back to our master. But as we begin to step off the plantation, the Spirit is there to minister to our heart, to overcome our distrust. The Spirit leads us into the enjoyment of our liberty in Christ. The Spirit enlarges our hearts and causes to see that we are royal sons and daughters, and that we may freely frolic about the king's palace wherever we please. The whole estate belongs to us. We are the heirs of God through Christ.

Now we serve God in the new covenant way of the Spirit, rather than in the old covenant way of trying to keep a written code. Now we obey, not because we *have* to, but because we *want* to. We want to obey, because the old Adam has died, and we are now new creatures in Christ, joined to another husband. Our hearts have been renewed by grace, and so we desire nothing more than to love and serve and glorify and enjoy our beloved husband forever.

**Sermon 7:  
The Letter and the Spirit  
3-17-02**

Now that we have spent some time working our way through the marriage analogy, this morning I want to zero in on the concluding statement at the very end of the paragraph, in verse 6: “But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.”

In particular, I want to zero in on the contrast that Paul makes here between two forms of serving God: serving God in the oldness of the Letter *versus* serving God in the newness of the Spirit.

It is not all that difficult to figure out what Paul means here by the phrase, “the oldness of the Letter.” The immediate context makes it quite clear. The Letter is simply a synonym for the Mosaic Law. Paul adds the term “oldness” here in contrast with “newness” in order to draw our attention to the redemptive historical transition from the old covenant to the new.

This reminds us of what the author of Hebrews says in Hebrews 8:13: “When he said, ‘A new covenant,’ He made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.”

Before the establishment of the new covenant in Christ’s blood, the Mosaic Law or covenant, was not called “the old covenant.” It was simply called “the Torah,” or “the covenant that Yahweh made with Israel.” Before Christ came, that covenant was the legally valid and binding administration under which the people of God operated and served God.

It is only when a new covenant has arrived on the scene that we would then look back on the preceding covenant administration and say, “That covenant is old.” The very terms “old” and “new” imply a change in covenant administration. The old covenant is obsolete. It is no longer functioning. The new covenant is the covenant under which the new covenant people of God, the church, serves Jesus Christ as its covenant Head and sovereign Lord.

Paul sees a sharp contrast between these two ways of serving God. The old covenant way, says Paul, is serving God “by the Letter,” while the new covenant way of serving God is serving “in the Spirit.”

Now it is tempting to regard the Letter-Spirit contrast as a contrast between the external, written Word of God and the internal impulse and guidance of the Spirit prompting us to obey. But that would be a huge mistake. The Letter-Spirit contrast is not a contrast between Word and Spirit, between objective revelation and subjective illumination. For both the Word and the Spirit were operative in both the old covenant and in the new.

First, the Spirit was present under the old covenant. He was present to build up the faith in the coming Messiah. The Spirit opened their hearts and minds to be able to comprehend the types and shadows of the ceremonial law, all of which pointed them to the Messiah to come and his work of atonement on their behalf. If the Spirit were not present in the old economy, not a single soul could have been saved until the day of Pentecost.

Conversely, the Word is operative in the new covenant. That is obvious. Just open your Bible, and you see that it is divided into two sections, the Old Testament and the New. These are actually misnomers. The first half of your Bible should be called, “The Old Covenant,” and the second half, “The New Covenant.” God’s authoritative revelation of his will for Israel is found in the Old Covenant documents, that is, the Law and the Prophets. God’s authoritative revelation of his will for the church is found in the New Covenant documents, that is, the teachings of Jesus and the apostles. Of course, even the Old Covenant

documents still retain their authority as God’s inspired Word, as Scripture, and are profitable for teaching, and correction, and instruction in righteousness. But the Old Covenant is no longer the immediate standard of conduct for the new covenant church. Only the New Covenant documents are properly speaking “the constitution of the church.”<sup>23</sup>

All of the teaching in the Old Covenant concerning God, the creation, his plan of salvation, and the coming Messiah is true and authoritative. But the Old Covenant cannot be looked to for direct moral imperatives, because it is not the constitution that defines how the new covenant church is supposed to live. We don’t get our marching orders from the book of Leviticus or the book of Joshua. We get our marching orders from Jesus. Remember, Jesus instructed the apostles to make disciples of all the nations, “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” And remember, he told them in the Upper Room that he would send the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, who would bring all things to their remembrance, so that they would be equipped in this task of teaching and laying the foundation of the new covenant church.

My point is this: both the old covenant people of God and the new covenant church have their respective constitutional documents, their revealed marching orders. Just as Israel had the Torah and the prophets, so we have the gospels and the writings of the apostles. So the Letter-Spirit contrast does not mean that Israel was guided by revealed writings, whereas the church is not and must rely solely on the inner promptings of the Spirit. That is simply not the case.

So if the Letter-Spirit contrast does not mean a contrast between the objective written Word and the illuminating work of the Spirit, what does Paul mean by this contrast between the Letter and the Spirit? As Reformed people, we believe in the analogy of Scripture, that is, the interpretive principle of comparing Scripture with Scripture. So it would be wise for us to look at some other passages to see if they shed any light on what Paul is saying here. There are two other passages where Paul uses the Letter-Spirit contrast: Romans 2:29 and 2 Corinthians 3:6. We only have time to look at the passage in 2 Corinthians 3 this morning.

## 2 Corinthians 3:1—4:6

2 Corinthians 3:1 Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you? 2 You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; 3 being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. 4 Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. 5 Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as *coming* from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, 6 who also made us adequate *as* servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. 7 But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading *as* it was, 8 how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory? 9 For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory. 10 For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory because of the glory that surpasses *it*. 11 For if that which fades away *was* with glory, much more that which remains *is* in glory. 12 Therefore having such a hope, we use great boldness in *our* speech, 13 and *are* not like Moses, *who* used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not look intently at the end of what was fading away. 14 But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. 15 But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; 16 but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, *there* is liberty. 18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being

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<sup>23</sup> “The treaty canon that governs the church of the new covenant as a formal community is the New Testament alone.” Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (p. 97).

transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit. Chapter 4:1 Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart, 2 but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God. 3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, 4 in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 5 For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus’ sake. 6 For God, who said, “Light shall shine out of darkness,” is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

2 Corinthians 3 is important, because it shows that, for Paul, when he speaks of our new covenant service as serving God in the Spirit, he does not divorce our new covenant service from the ministry of the objective Word.

Recall, in the context of 2 Corinthians, Paul is defending his gospel ministry. We see this in chapter 3, verse 1: “Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you?”

He describes his gospel ministry using a key phrase in 3:6: “as ministers of the new covenant.” Paul’s ministry of proclaiming the gospel is not something that he has undertaken for himself, but God has called him and made him adequate as a minister or servant of the new covenant. All that he does as a gospel preacher is guided and controlled by the new covenant, of which he is simply a servant. He has nothing to say but what the new covenant says.

It is in this context, that Paul then uses this Letter-Spirit contrast. Again, as we have seen already, it is a contrast between the old covenant and the new. Just as Moses was the servant of the old covenant, and had a ministry as a servant of that covenant, so Paul is the servant of the new covenant, and exercises a ministry as a servant of that covenant. What are some of the differences between Paul’s ministry and that of Moses?

(1) The ministry of Moses was a ministry of bringing to bear upon the people of God an external code of regulations and demands, whereas the ministry of Paul under the new covenant brings not a code but a transformation of the heart. The Law was “written on tablets of stone” (verse 3), “in letters engraved on stones” (v. 7), whereas the new covenant is “written on tablets of human hearts.”

(2) The ministry of Moses produced death and condemnation, but the ministry of Paul produces life and righteousness (verses 6-9). The ministry of Moses as a servant of the old covenant was a ministry of death, because the old covenant was a covenant of works. In order for Israel to live and prosper in the land of Canaan, Israel had to obey the Law of Moses. As long as Israel remained faithful, Israel would live. But as soon as the nation broke the covenant and went after other gods, the curse of the covenant was put into effect, and the result was death.

(3) The ministry of Moses was full of glory, but the glory was fading away, since it was the glory of a fading and temporary covenant, whereas the ministry of Paul under the new covenant is the glory of Christ himself, a glory that does not fade away but “remains in glory” (verse 11). The old covenant, the Mosaic Law, was given with a temporary end in view. It was given, as we saw in Galatians, “until the Seed should come.” The word “until” means that from the very outset, the Law was given for a finite period of time. From the very outset it was given with a foreordained terminus – namely, the advent of the Seed of the woman, who was born under the Law in order to fulfill it and bring it to its predestined end. Paul finds great significance in the fading glory of Moses’ face. He sees in the fading of the glory a sign of the inherently temporary and fading nature of the Law itself. Although it came with glory – for the Law was the

reflection of God’s own righteousness and holiness – the glory of the Law could not remain forever. It had to give way to the greater glory of God’s righteousness as seen in the face of Jesus Christ.

(4) The ministry of Moses was veiled, so that the Israelites could not look intently at the end of what was fading away, but the ministry of Paul, as a servant of the new covenant, is characterized by great boldness of speech, for it is a ministry that causes us to gaze openly and fully upon the glory of Christ with unveiled faces (verses 12-13, 18).

Now all of these contrasts between the ministry of the old covenant and the ministry of the new are summed up in verse 6 – “the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” Everything that Paul says about the Law – its external nature as a code engraved on stones, its character as a covenant of works that brought death and condemnation, its temporary nature, and its veiled form – all of these things can be summed up in the word, “Letter.” Conversely, everything we have seen about the gospel ministry of Paul as a minister of the new covenant – its internal transformation of the heart, its character as a covenant of grace that gives justification and life, its permanence, and its unveiled boldness in setting forth the glory of Christ – can be summed up in the word “Spirit.”

### **Paul’s Christological understanding of the Spirit**

In our day, when we have Charismatics to contend with, this Letter-Spirit contrast may seem to be a dangerous thing. But that’s because we’ve bought into the Charismatic definition of the Spirit as mere subjective feelings. As you read through 2 Cor. 3, however, the emphasis on the Spirit’s role in the new covenant doesn’t relate primarily to subjective experience. Certainly there is a subjective element – the Jeremiah 31 emphasis on the external-external contrast between the old and the new covenant.

But notice how this internal/heart aspect of the new covenant gets fleshed out here. Paul takes the Jeremiah 31 promise that God would write the Law on Israel’s heart and what does he say? He says it’s being fulfilled through his own ministry. As a minister of the new covenant, who proclaims Christ and him crucified, the Spirit of the living God is writing upon tablets of human hearts.

Read verses 2-3. The NIV is superior to the NAS at this point: “You yourselves are our letter, written on hearts, known and read by everybody. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.”

There are three agents here in this process of fulfilling Jeremiah 31, this gospel process of writing God’s will upon the hearts of the Corinthians: Christ, Paul, and the Spirit.

(1) Christ. “You are a letter from Christ.” In Jeremiah it was Yahweh himself who was going to write his Torah, the very Torah that he gave at Sinai, on the heart of the people of God. But this was prophetic language, a prophetic way of speaking. God does not literally write the Torah on the hearts of Christians in the new covenant. If he did, then Christians would be obligated to keep the whole Torah, not just the Decalogue. What Paul does is transform the prophecy in light of Christ. When we come to the fulfillment in Christ, we find that it is Christ who is writing his own Torah upon our hearts. No, it is even closer than that – we *are* Christ’s Torah! “You are a letter from Christ.”

(2) Paul. “The result of our ministry.” Why does Paul insert himself into the fulfillment of the Jeremiah 31 prophecy? Because the ministry of Paul is nothing less than the ministry of the gospel. Paul is nothing. He is only a preacher, a proclaimer of Christ.

2 Cor. 4:4-5: ... in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 5 For

we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus’ sake.

Although Paul is dead and gone, he is still preaching to us through his Christ-centered gospel ministry. As the ministers of Christ proclaim to you the gospel that Paul preached, Paul is preaching to you through them. But Christ’s ministers, like Paul, care nothing about what you think of them. They care only that you might see Christ – the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. Unlike Moses, who used to put a veil over his face so that the Israelites would not gaze upon the fading glory of the Law, Paul uses great boldness of speech. He declares to you the unfathomable riches of Jesus Christ. He holds nothing back. He declares the whole counsel of God, so that with unveiled faces you might gaze directly upon the face of Jesus Christ, and be transformed into his image, from glory to glory.

(3) The Spirit. “Written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God.” How does the Spirit fit into this ministry of the new covenant? Paul tells us quite plainly.

2 Cor. 3:15-17: But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; 16 but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. 17 *Now the Lord is the Spirit*, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. 18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

What an incredible statement. “The Lord Jesus Christ is the Spirit.” Christ crucified and Christ risen. He was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father. He was raised by the Spirit of holiness. He is now invested with the Spirit of God, the brightness or outshining God’s glory. Jesus is the one who has the glory that does not fade away. And so we must gaze upon him, with unveiled faces. We must not gaze upon Moses any longer. We must gaze upon the one who now bears the fullness of the Spirit and glory of God.

What was Moses’ task as he went up on the mountain? It was to receive the tablets of stone, the two tablets of the Law. And as he went up to receive the Law, he basked in the glory of God as revealed in his holy Law. And his face so basked in that glory, that when he came down off the mountain, his face was still glowing with the reflected glory of God’s holiness and righteousness. But for all the glory of God’s holiness as revealed in the Law, it was only a fading and temporary glory that could not last forever.

Paul is saying, Now that the old covenant, the Law, has come to an end, and the new covenant has been ratified in Christ, the glory of God is now captured and reflected in a new way, and it centers not upon the Law, but upon the gospel. All the glory of God is now centered in Jesus Christ himself. Paul views himself as being like Moses. Just as Moses went up to bask in the glory and came down with a shining face, so Paul has gone up into Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, and he has basked in the radiance of Jesus, the cross-enthroned Lord of glory. But unlike Moses, when he comes down off the mountain to preach to the people, he does not put a veil over his face. Why not? Because this glory, the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, does not fade away, but remains permanently and everlastingly glorious – it remains glorious even as Christ himself remains glorious.

As Vos says in his sermon on this text, “The More Excellent Ministry,”<sup>24</sup> Paul’s entire task can be summed up in his reflecting back the Christ-glory, caught first by himself in order to be passed on to others. That is what Paul means by the Spirit. The Spirit’s role in the new covenant is certainly internal and subjective. It involves the inner transformation of our whole being into a living epistle from Christ, so that our Christ-transformed hearts are known and read by all men. But that inner, subjective work is grounded in the objective ministry of the preaching of Christ. For the Spirit should not be viewed merely as some additional power who comes alongside of the preaching of Christ to make our hearts receptive to it. That is

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<sup>24</sup> Geerhardus Vos, “The More Excellent Ministry” (a sermon on 2 Cor. 3:18), in *Grace and Glory* (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), pp. 82-102.

true enough. But it does not go far enough. The Spirit *is* the glory of Christ. To quote again from Vos: “The Christ-glory is a living and self-communicating power, transforming both those who mediate it and those who receive it from glory to glory into the likeness of the Lord.”

### **Application**

We have come, then, to the heart of the contrast between the Letter and the Spirit. Paul refers to the Mosaic Law as “the Letter” because it is an external code. By its very nature, the Law cannot transform. It cannot change the heart and give spiritual life. It can only demand. It stands out there, outside us, engraved on tablets of stone, commanding us, and, when we fail, condemning us. But our hearts remain cold and lifeless. “The letter stands for the inability of the Law as such to translate itself into action” (Vos).

By contrast, the ministry of the new covenant, the ministry of the gospel of free justification in Christ, is a ministry of inner transformation, a ministry of the Spirit, not of the letter. The gospel proclamation of Christ and him crucified, causes men to behold the glory of Christ with unveiled faces. And as we gaze upon that glory, we are transformed into the same image, from glory unto glory.

God does not want mere obedience. It matters not to him if you externally observe the commandments of the Mosaic Law. Any Pharisee can do that. He wants your heart. We are his servants. Think of the servants who wait upon a great king. Their minds and hearts become one with the king’s. They know his every mood, his every desire, even before he knows it himself. And they are eager to jump to his service to do his bidding, even before the command comes from his lips. So in Christ, we have become joined to Christ, married to him, so that we cannot even tell where Christ’s will ends and our will begins. As Paul stated, we *become* the very Torah of Christ! We want what Christ wants. We long for his glory. And so we bring forth much fruit unto God in this new covenant service of life and liberty in the Spirit.

Let me conclude by quoting from Vos’s sermon one more time: “In the Judaistic controversy which shook the early church, forces and tendencies were at work deeply rooted in the sinful human heart. In modernized apparel they confront us still to the present day. There are still abroad forms of Christless gospel. There prevails still a subtle form of legalism which would rob the Savior of his crown of glory, earned by the cross, and would make of him a second Moses, offering us the stones of the law instead of the life-bread of the gospel. Let us pray that it may be given to the church to repudiate and cast out this error with the resoluteness of Paul.” Let us pray that the gospel of Christ might be preached by Christ’s servants and thus be “what it was to Paul and his converts, a mirror of vision and transfiguration after the image of the Lord.”

**Sermon 8:**  
**Conclusion to “The Letter and the Spirit”/Objections**  
3-24-02

Last week we began to examine the brief but crucial antithesis at the end of Romans 7, verse 6: “so that we serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.”

Let me briefly summarize what we saw last week:

First, the Letter-Spirit antithesis is equivalent to the antithesis between the old covenant and the new covenant, Law and Gospel.

Second, this does not mean that the old covenant saints served God by studying and obeying the written Scriptures, while we in the new covenant serve God apart from Scripture by following the guidance of the Spirit. Both Word and Spirit are inseparable, and present in both the old covenant and the new.

Third, the Letter-Spirit contrast, for Paul, means this: The new covenant, by the power of the Spirit, brings inner transformation of the heart – whereas the old covenant, the Letter, was an external code, written on tablets of stone, and so was unable to empower us to obedience.

Why is the ministry of the new covenant a superior ministry of the Spirit, written on tablets of human hearts? Because the new covenant proclaims the glory of Christ – Christ crucified and Christ exalted. Paul views the ministry of the Spirit and the ministry of Christ as inseparably bound together in the new covenant – so much so that he says in verse 17, “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”

“The Lord is the Spirit.” This does not mean that the second and third persons of the godhead are now collapsed into one. The personal distinctions among all three persons of the godhead remain. What Paul is saying is that by means of his death and resurrection, Christ has become invested with the power of the Spirit, so that now, after the resurrection, all the power and glory of the Spirit is centered in Christ. There is no other source or spring of the Spirit’s power, but Christ crucified and risen.

To say that the Lord is the Spirit is the same thing as what Jesus himself said at the feast of tabernacles as recorded in John chapter 7, verses 37-39:

Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’” But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Jesus is calling out and saying, “Are you thirsty for the Spirit of the living God? Do you want the rivers of the living water of the Spirit to flow from within? Then you must believe in me.” And then John adds his editorial commentary, in case you didn’t get it, that Jesus was speaking of the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were going to receive, for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus had not yet been glorified. Jesus had not yet been lifted up and glorified upon the cross. The cross, by which the new covenant was ratified, is the great event that releases the power of the Spirit. The cross is what opened the floodgates so that the Spirit of transformation might flow.

Many Christians today are confused about the Spirit’s role in the life and ministry of the church. Many today rightly desire the Spirit’s powerful work, they want to see and feel the presence of God in their lives. But they go about it the wrong way. Charismatics seek the Spirit directly, as if he were some force or power. Nomists or legalists seek it in the Law. The consistent teaching of the NT, from Jesus to Peter to John

to Paul, is that the only way to know and feel the Spirit’s life-giving power is by means of the knowledge of Jesus Christ. It is the preaching of Christ, not the Spirit, that releases the Spirit’s power. The Spirit’s entire role and ministry in the new covenant age is to give us more of Christ, to shine his powerful spotlight upon Christ, and to give us greater faith in Christ.

No alleged movement of the Spirit is truly a movement of the Spirit, unless it gives all the glory to Jesus Christ. On the other hand, every preacher, every church, every movement that exalts the name and the glory to Jesus Christ is a preacher and a church and a movement animated by the Spirit.

To summarize, then, the Letter refers to the external nature of the Law, its inability to change our hearts and empower us to obedience. The Spirit stands for the life-changing, life-transforming power of Jesus Christ. Where is the Spirit of life and inner transformation to be found? In Christ. The Spirit is the unfading glory of Christ that beams out from the face of Paul as he preaches Christ and him crucified. That is what changes hearts. The message of free grace, the message of the gospel, centered upon Christ and him crucified and exalted – that is the only thing that can give life and empower us to obey.

### **Comparison of 2 Corinthians 3 with Romans 7:5-6**

That’s what we saw last week. Let’s return, now, to Romans 7 and see how this helps shed light on the Letter-Spirit contrast in verse 6.

(1) The role of the Spirit in Romans 7 is just as Christocentric as it is in 2 Corinthians 3. The glory of Christ, proclaimed in the gospel ministry of Paul and his successors, is the Spirit. It is as we behold the glory of Christ that the Spirit of Christ transforms us and makes us alive. Paul makes the same point in Romans 7:1-6. We have died to the Law in order that we might be joined to Another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bring forth fruit unto God. Beholding Christ’s glory is now spoken of in an even more vivid metaphor – the one-flesh union of man and wife, and offspring as the happy fruit of that union. We do not merely gaze upon Christ from a distance. By his Spirit, we become one with him, that we might enjoy him, and love him, and thus become fruitful in our service to him.

(2) There is no room for both Christ and the Law. In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul does not say that the ministry of Moses continues in the new covenant alongside the ministry of Christ. No! The Law has come to an end! Its glory has faded, petered out! The new covenant ministry of Paul replaces that of Moses. And Paul goes up on the mountain to receive a far greater and lasting glory than Moses. The glory of Moses was a fading glory, destined to come to an end and give way to the far surpassing and eternal glory of Christ. Unlike the Law, the glory of Christ shall never, never come to an end. Paul makes the same point in the Romans 7:1-6, Paul uses the marriage analogy, and he makes it quite plain that in order to be joined unto Christ we must first die to the Law. You cannot serve two masters.

(3) In 2 Corinthians 3:17, Paul said, “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” Liberty here does not mean license. It means our deliverance from the ministry of death and condemnation, our liberty from the Mosaic Law as a covenant of works. This liberty has been secured for us by Christ. The letter kills, but the Spirit makes alive. The letter leads to bondage, but the Spirit brings liberty, a liberty of inner transformation so that God’s will is internalized within. This inner transformation could never be brought about by the letter. In fact, those who are enslaved to the letter cannot know the freedom of this transformation, and are caught up in the cycle of transgression, guilt, condemnation, and death. Paul makes the same point in Romans 7:5-6: the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in our bodies, so that we brought forth fruit unto death. But now, having died to that which held us captive, we have been released from the Law, so that we might serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the Letter. This new liberty in the Spirit that is proclaimed to us in Jesus Christ, is a glorious liberty. It is a liberty not of license, but a liberation unto the true service of God in the Spirit.

## Objections

Over the past two months, I have been laboring in this portion of the Word of God, Romans 5-8, in order to better understand Paul’s teaching on the Law. To the best of my ability, I have been attempting to set forth Paul’s view of the Law in the context of Paul’s covenantal and redemptive historical thought. We’re almost done. I have one more sermon planned, in which I will give a quick overview of the remainder of Romans 7 and the first part of chapter 8.

However, before we do so, I’d like to stop right here and answer two major objections that may be raised against the view of the Law I been defending.

### (1) The fear of being bereft of a standard

The *first objection* is a common one: “If the ten commandments are not the immediate standard of conduct for the NT believer, how do we avoid antinomianism? If not through the ten commandments, then how do we know what God’s moral will is?”

The ten commandments were given in the form of a covenant. They are in fact called “the tablets of the covenant.” The historical prologue, “I am the Lord your God who brought you up out of the land of Egypt” stands at the beginning to make it clear that these laws are binding only on Israel, only the covenant people who were redeemed out of Egypt. Clearly, these are covenant stipulations, given only to those who are party to the covenant. They are not universal moral law binding on all mankind in all ages.

Since the old covenant has been abolished, and since the church is under a new covenant, the ten commandments per se cannot be placed upon the church as the eternal expression of God’s moral will. Even the most rigorous traditionalist would not do that (unless he is a Seventh Day Sabbatarian), for he would then be obligated to observe the Sabbath on Saturday.

Nevertheless, it is true that the ten commandments, with the exception of the fourth commandment, are founded on God’s eternal moral will which cannot change since they are founded on God’s unchanging nature. The ten commandments therefore are not binding as a covenant, that is, as the direct moral standard for the believer. Nevertheless they are re-issued in a new form, in a form applicable to the new covenant administration of God’s moral will as summed up by Jesus Christ himself in the two great commandments.

Just as Israel had a catechetical summary of God’s moral will in the form of the ten commandments, so the church has the two great commandments.

Mark 12:28-31: One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, “What commandment is the foremost of all?” 29 Jesus answered, “The foremost is, ‘HEAR, O ISRAEL! THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD; 30 AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.’ 31 “The second is this, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

Interestingly, these two commandments are found in the OT, but neither one is listed in the ten commandments. The first greatest commandment is from Deuteronomy 6, and the second greatest commandment is from Leviticus 19. Jesus pulls these two commandments out of the Mosaic context and

places his stamp of approval upon them and says to his new covenant church, “Here – here are the two things you should focus on and pay attention to. Everything is summed up here.”<sup>25</sup>

Actually, at the time Jesus did this, when he pulled these two commandments out and made them special, at the time, the old covenant itself was still in effect. He had not yet died and ratified the new covenant in his blood. That is why when you read the gospels, these two commandments are quoted as found in Deuteronomy and Leviticus without modification.

But when the new covenant itself is about to be actually put in force in the Upper Room, these two commandments change slightly, at least in the wording and emphasis. We see how Jesus transforms first commandment in his high priestly prayer as he about to face the cross the very next day:

John 17:1-3: Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

There can be no doubt that Jesus is here alluding to Deuteronomy 6, the Shema, “Hear O Israel, the Lord you God is one Lord,” the great monotheistic creed of Israel. Jesus transforms it and says that to know and worship the only true God, you must know and worship Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of the Father.

As for the second greatest commandment, love for neighbor, Jesus modified it in the upper room with his disciples, when he broke the bread and offered the cup of the new covenant to his disciples. He said, “A new commandment I give to you.” Notice that if there is a new covenant, then there must also be a new commandment. All commandments in the Bible are stipulations of a covenant. So he says, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you” (John 13:34). The command to love is the same, but the motive is different. We no longer love our neighbor as ourselves, but as Christ loved us. The former is a self-centered motive. The latter is the motive of union with Christ in his self-sacrifice.

Because of these modifications of Deuteronomy and Leviticus in light of Christ, when we come to 1 John 3:23, the two commandments are presented together in their new covenant form: “This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us.”

Are the two great commandments sufficient? Do they tell you everything you need to know about our ethical duty as Christians? No. But remember the ten commandments weren’t sufficient either. They were only a catechetical summary of God’s moral will. Likewise, the two great commandments are not sufficient. They must be interpreted and applied in light of the all the ethical exhortations and applications found throughout the NT which flesh the two commandments out for us in concrete ways.

Nevertheless, the two great commandments are indeed the focal point of the new covenant ethic. As Paul says in Romans 13:8-10: Love is the fulfillment of the Law. Every command is summed up in the love command – whether it be “thou shalt not commit adultery,” or “thou shalt not murder,” or whatever other commandment there may be – they are all summed up in this one word, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

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<sup>25</sup> “The NT *never* points *anyone* to the Decalogue as a summary of God’s moral will. It only comes close once – Romans 13 cites about four of them. But what the NT does when people ask for a summary of God’s will, it mentions either Deut. 6:4 or Lev. 19:18 or their combination.” T. David Gordon, tape # 3.

So even though we are not obligated directly to keep the ten commandments, there is no need to fear antinomianism, or moral relativism. We have the two great commandments of the new covenant to guide us.

(2) NT passages that appear to contradict the thesis

The *second objection* is this: “How do you deal with the passages where Paul seems to refer to the commandments in a positive way as something that we as NT believers should observe?”

Paul sometimes quotes a commandment from the Mosaic Law as if it were still binding on Christians. For example, he cites “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” twice – In Romans 13:9 and Galatians 5:14. The question is not whether Christians must love their neighbor. The question is whether we must do it because the Law says to do it. I like what Douglas Moo says about these texts: “Certainly the words are derived ultimately from Leviticus 19:18. But Paul’s citation of the verse is due to the fact that Jesus had already singled it out as central to his demand. Paul cites the text, then, not as an Old Testament commandment, but as an Old Testament commandment already transformed into the demand of Christ.”<sup>26</sup>

Another example would be Ephesians 6:1-2, where Paul says: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother’ (which is the first commandment with a promise).” Again, the answer is that Paul is not quoting the fifth commandment as if the commandment itself is binding on Christians. If you doubt this, just ask yourself whether obedient children live longer than non-obedient children. Furthermore, the promise is more specific. It doesn’t just promise length of life in general, but length of life in the land of Canaan. Yes, Paul says Christian children are required to obey their parents in the Lord, and then he quotes the fifth commandment to support this. But he does so – not because the fifth commandment of the Decalogue is literally in effect – but because the same requirement in the Decalogue comes to children “in the Lord,” that is, as a new covenant stipulation.

Then there are those passages that use the word “commandments” in general. For example, in 1 Corinthians 7:19 Paul says, “Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God.” Or in 1 John 2:3 we read, “By this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.” But to assume that these generic references to commandments refers specifically to the Mosaic Law or the ten commandments is to beg the question. In every case, the context shows that the commandments in view are the commandments of Jesus and the apostles. In John 14:15, Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep *my* commandments.” Likewise, later on 1 Corinthians, Paul says to the person who thinks he is more spiritual than Paul, “Let him recognize that the things which I write to you are *the Lord’s* commandment.”

### Application

These two objections to the view of the Law that I have been expounding are not as weighty as they appear at first. They only appear weighty because we have been trained to read these passages in light of the traditional system.

Those who are opposed to this view of the Law are afraid that if you give up the ten commandments, then you are left with no commandments, no objective standard of obedience in the new covenant. The fear is that without the ten commandments, we are opening up a Pandora’s box of license and antinomianism. I would counter this by pointing out the underlying assumption behind this fear. The assumption is that the Mosaic Law is the exclusive source of ethical teaching, and that the New Testament

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<sup>26</sup> Moo, *The Law, the Gospel, and the Modern Christian* (p. 360).

contains no ethical teaching and no commandments. But Jesus instructed the apostles to go and make disciples of all the nations, “teaching them to observe everything that I have commanded you.” Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said by the ancients, but I say unto you.” And the people were amazed at his teaching for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Jesus is the prophet that Moses said would come after him, one greater than Moses, who brings a new law for a new Israel.

When Jesus healed the blind man on John 9, the Pharisees said, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he is from” (vv. 28-29). Let us not be like the Pharisees, who were very confident that God had spoken through Moses, but whose eyes were blinded to the fact that in these last days, God was speaking through his Son. Let us not despise the authority of Jesus. As the disciples of Christ, let us look to him in humble faith and obedience.

When the disciples were on the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus appeared in glory together with Moses and Elijah. And the disciples thought it would be a great idea to build three tabernacles for each of them, as if they were equals. But then a voice came from heaven and said, “This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.” And when they opened their eyes, Moses and Elijah were gone and they saw no one but Jesus.

The objective revelation of God in the New Covenant Scriptures contains for us the apostolic proclamation of Christ and him crucified. And so in order to serve God in the new covenant way of the Spirit, we must not ignore the preaching of the Word of God, the apostolic proclamation of the gospel. The new converts in Acts devoted themselves to the apostles’ doctrine. So should we. We must daily read and study the New Testament. We must daily read and study the Old Testament too, not as if it were our immediate standard of conduct, but as the inspired old covenant witness to Jesus Christ. To use Paul’s phrase, we must read it without a veil. As long as we use the Old Testament as an external code, a veil lies upon our hearts. That is the essence of the Jewish interpretation of the Old Testament. For us, as Christians, the Old Testament is *profitable* for instruction and training in righteousness. The word “profitable” is noteworthy. It’s not the word that Paul would have chosen if the OT itself were the immediate standard of conduct. Thus the OT is authoritative, not because we are bound to it as a code, but because we have turned to the Lord, and the veil has been removed, so that now we read and interpret the Old Testament in the glorious light of Christ who sheds his beams of light upon all the Scriptures, so that we see more and more of the sufferings and the glory of Christ, the glorious image into which we are being conformed from glory to glory as by the Lord, the Spirit.

**Sermon 9:  
Israel’s History Personified**  
4-7-02

Romans 7 is a notoriously difficult and controversial passage of Scripture. Who is the “I” in this passage?

The first view is that Paul is describing the ongoing struggles that he as a Christian has with his flesh. This is probably the most popular position. In support of this view, consider the following:

- Verses 15-22 - every Christian can identify with this. When we sin, we are doing things that are really contrary to our regenerate heart. We can’t stand ourselves. We loath our sins.
- Verse 16 - “I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good”
- Verse 22 - “I joyfully concur with the Law of God in the inner man”
- Verse 25a - “with my mind I am serving the Law of God”

These are strong affirmations of the goodness of God’s Law. They are the cry of a soul that has been subdued to love God’s law and delight in it. These things could never be said by an unregenerate person. In fact, Paul says this quite plainly.

Read chapter 8:7.

That is the first view. But it is not without problems. Consider the following:

- Verse 14 - “sold into bondage to sin”
- Verse 25 - “with my flesh, serving the law of sin”

Is it possible to say that a regenerate person is in bondage to sin? Has not Paul clearly taught in chapter 6 that sin shall not have dominion over those who are in Christ?

Considerations like this have led some to adopt a second view – the view that Paul is describing himself as an unconverted Jew, when he attempted to keep the Law in the strength of the flesh and found himself unable to do so. There are a number of statements in the text that seem to support this view:

- Verse 24 - O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me?
- Chapter 8:1-2 describes conversion – the transition from conviction of sin and laboring under the terrors of the Law to closing with Christ and entering into the joyful freedom of “no condemnation” in Christ.

However, both views suffer from one devastating difficulty. Neither view can explain the statement in verse 9, that Paul was once alive apart from the Law. When would that be true of Paul? He was born a Jew – of the tribe of Benjamin, circumcised on the eighth day. There was never a time when Paul was alive apart from the Law. Both the regenerate and unregenerate view are wrong, because they are looking at the “I” in autobiographical terms, as if Paul were describing his own experience.

What we’ve got to see is that the text is not going to fit into an *ordo salutis* scheme. It’s not primarily concerned with the believer’s conflict with remaining sin. It is concerned with the question of the Law. The topic of Romans 7 is the affect of the Law upon Israel in redemptive history. The “I” is not autobiographical but redemptive historical. “I” is Israel personified. Paul uses the first person because he identifies existentially with the experience of Israel under the Law. The overwhelmingly negative and death-producing experience of corporate Israel under the Sinai covenant is representative of any one who serves God in the letter rather than the Spirit, that is, under the Law rather than under grace.

Verse 9 would then be describing the time before the Law came at Sinai. The experience of Israel prior to the Law was one in which the curse of the Law was not operative. If you notice in the narrative in the book of Exodus, before the Jews arrive at Mount Sinai, they grumble and complain, but they do not die. After Sinai, however, when Israel sins, they are immediately struck down and their bodies are scattered in the wilderness.

This interpretation explains both aspects of the text – the aspects that seem to point to regenerate person, and the aspects that point to an unregenerate person.

Verse 22 - echoes Psalm 119. O how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day!

And yet, verse 18 - echoes the lament of God to Moses, “I have seen this people, and indeed, it is a stubborn people” (Deut. 9:13). This is why Moses himself predicted that the Sinai covenant would come to an end, because of the hardness of Israel’s heart. And the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel picked up on this and predicted the coming of the new covenant, when God would take away Israel’s heart of stone and replace it with a heart of flesh.

These contrasts are not absolute. Not every Israelite had a heart of stone. But when viewed from the corporate perspective of the nation as a whole, this seemed to be their condition. Even the godly in Israel, who loved God’s holy law, longed for the eschatological outpouring of the Spirit in the new covenant age, when the nation would be restored to God in true obedience of heart.

#### **The flow of Paul’s argument (Romans 7:1—8:4)**

In 7:1-6, Paul uses the analogy of marriage to argue that just as death dissolves a marriage relationship, so the death of Christ (and our having died with Christ in his death) has dissolved our former covenantal obligation to the Mosaic Law mediated through the covenant headship of Adam.

In the course of making this point, he stated in v. 5 that “when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death.” This is what it is like to be under the Law. Israel’s sinful passions were aroused by the law, and the result was not life but death.

This then logically raises the objection: “What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be!”

The next paragraph, vv. 7-13, answers this objection. Paul shows that the Law is not the problem, but sin. Sin has co-opted the Law and turned it into an occasion of further sin, thus showing how exceedingly sinful sin is. The Law itself is holy and righteous and good. In fact it is spiritual.

Verse 10 - the dual sanctions of life and death. Deuteronomy 28 – the blessings on Mount Gerazim, and the curses on Mount Ebal. “See I have set before you today life and death, a blessing and a curse.”

But even though the Law is holy and righteous and good, it has now power to give spiritual life or to empower you to obey it (7:14-25). The problem is not the Law, but Israel – Israel is sold into bondage to sin. The very fact that I agree with the Law that it is good, and that I practice the very sins that I do not want to practice – this all goes to show that the Law is not at fault, but Israel’s need for a new heart.

Verse 23 - “taking me into captivity” - the Mosaic covenant ended in exile

Verse 24 - “Wretched man!” – echoes Jeremiah’s cry in the book of Lamentations as he reflects upon the destruction of the temple and the mournful situation of Israel in captivity. “Who will deliver me?” Crying out for the Messiah to come! O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel that mourns in lonely exile here.

Verse 25 - “the law of God” versus “the law of sin.” The word *nomos* is used in both phrases. In the vast majority of instances, *nomos* means the Mosaic law, the Sinai covenant. Obviously this would be the correct translation for the first phrase, the law of God. But what about the second, the law of sin?

If you compare this verse with 8:2 you see a similar contrast: “The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death.” That verb “set you free” is the same verb used back in 7:3, with reference to the wife being set free from the law by means of the death of her former husband. So I believe that phrase, “the law of sin” in 7:25 and 8:2 is referring to the Mosaic law.

Why does Paul call it the law of sin? In verse 7, he asked, “Is the law sin?” and he replied, “May it never be!” So whatever he means by the law of sin, he doesn’t mean “the law *which is* sin.” The key is to notice that the contrast is between “the law of God” on the one hand and “the law of sin” on the other. They are the same law, but viewed from two different perspectives. When viewed from the perspective of what the law intrinsically is and demands – it is the law of God. The law, or covenant of works is holy and righteous and good. If Adam had not sinned, it would never have been a problem.

But when viewed from the perspective of the law as that to which we are bound in fallen Adam, the law or covenant of works is a law of sin. It is a law that has been coopted by sin and has thus caused sin to grow worse, pouring oil on the fire, and making our sinful passions break forth into a raging forest fire of lust and transgression.

The point of vv. 14-25, then, is to show that Israel needs a new covenant. The Law has been utterly impotent to produce true obedience and true conformity, from the heart, to its holy and righteous demands. Who will deliver Israel from this condition of spiritual death?

#### **The Law’s inability is overcome by God, acting in Christ by the Spirit (8:1-4)**

Chapter 8:1 - “now” – this is the redemptive historical “now” of the transition from the old age to the new age in Christ (cp. “But now, apart from the Law” - Rom. 3:21).

In verse 2, Paul repeats what he said at the very beginning of chapter 7 in vv. 1-6, where he said that through Christ’s death as our second Adam we have been set free from the Law. Notice that he also picks up on the letter-Spirit contrast. Being set free from the Law means being free in order to walk in the Spirit.

Read Rom. 8:1-4

Notice that in verse 3 we have a summary of Romans 7. “What the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh.” If we are in any doubt about the topic of Romans 7, this verse ought to clear it away. The topic of Romans 7 is the total inability of the Law to produce righteousness. It is not that the Law itself is unrighteous. It just simply has no power to empower us to righteousness. It is weak on account of the flesh. Therefore, God had to do what the Law could not do. And he did so by sending his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, thus condemning sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the Law – a righteousness that the Law could only demand of us, but never give us the power to fulfill it – that righteous requirement of the Law is now fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

## Objection

But perhaps you object, If “I” equals Israel, then how does Romans 7 apply to Paul’s original audience, the Christians at Rome, the great majority of whom were Gentiles? Why should the Gentiles at Rome be concerned about Israel’s experience of spiritual frustration under the Law?

My answer is that the experience of Israel under the Law is a paradigm that can be applied by analogy to the experience of all mankind under the covenant of works. This approach makes sense since Israel’s total history seems to be a kind of “replay” of the creation and fall of Adam. The banishment of Adam and Eve from the garden is replayed in the exile of Israel from the land. Note Paul’s use of the word “deceived” in verse 11. This seems to be an intentional echo of the Genesis 3 account of the fall of man.

Paul is thoroughly engrossed, throughout the book of Romans, with Israel’s experience under the Law as a paradigm for human failure in general under the covenant of works. One thing that proves this is the fact that the book of Romans is addressed primarily to Gentile Christians. And yet, the whole book is about Israel and the Law.

Romans 11:32 is a good summary of Paul’s entire argument in the first 11 chapters: “God has shut up all (both Jews and Gentiles) in disobedience so that he may show mercy to all (both Jews and Gentiles).”

That’s one point: Israel’s history is a paradigm for the history of the human race as a whole. But there’s another point, moving in the opposite direction. And that is that the human race as a whole can identify with Israel’s history. The Gentiles may not be Jews. They may not have been there when the law came at Sinai. But they can identify with the experience, because they too in some way have experienced the same frustration of wanting to keep the Law but not being able to.

There is an existential dimension to the history of redemption. By existential I mean, having to do with you personally, and your individual experience. What do I mean when I say that there is an existential dimension to the history of redemption? Simply this. The history of redemption is not only an objective historical narrative that happened “back then” but a drama that we in some sense recapitulate in our own spiritual history as individuals. Due to the genius of divine revelation, there is an interplay between the *ordo salutis* and the *historia salutis*, between the personal and the redemptive historical dimensions of salvation. We have an example of this right in the nearby context – in Romans 6:1-11. The death and resurrection of Christ is a once-for-all, redemptive historical event. It can never be repeated. Yet each and every individual who comes to faith in Christ and is baptized, becomes a participant in the drama. You and I are co-crucified with Christ. It’s as if we were actually there on Good Friday when the Roman soldiers nailed Jesus to the cross. We were in Christ. When he died, we died. And we were co-raised with Christ as well. The redemptive events of the past are somehow lifted into a cosmic timeline, so that you and I, though we live thousands of years later, are nevertheless drawn into the action as participants in the drama of redemptive history. Baptism is the moment when the two dimensions intersect. By means of baptism, we are lifted out of the temporal time-line of ordinary history and inserted into the eschatological movement of redemptive history that culminates in the cross and exaltation of Christ.

Let’s apply this to chapter 7.

Read 7:1

It would be a mistake to assume that at this point Paul is addressing the Jewish minority at Rome. Most of the Christians at Rome were probably God-fearers before they became Christians. God-fearers were Gentiles who had associated themselves with the synagogue. This meant that they had attempted in some way to place themselves under the Mosaic Law, at least large parts of it, including often the dietary

restrictions, the Sabbath, etc., although rarely including circumcision. This is why Paul addresses those in the church of Rome as those “who know the Law” (Rom. 7:1).

The experience of the Gentile God-fearers is an existential repetition of Israel’s experience. All who are under the Mosaic Law, whether Jews or God-fearing Gentiles, were participants in Israel’s history. The frustrating and death-producing experience of Israel under the Law is therefore an experience that even these Gentiles could “identify” with by union with Christ. But these Gentiles must not remain in the pre-Christian epoch of their spiritual development. They must follow Israel’s history all the way to the cross, where Christ became a curse under the Law in order to redeem those who were under the Law. As they follow Israel’s history to the cross, they must also follow it to the resurrection, when Christ was raised out from under the Law. Thus, they must reckon themselves dead to the Law in Christ.

A modern parallel to the Gentile God-fearers at Rome would be those Christians who think that they are bound by the Mosaic Law. They are not necessarily legalists in the same sense as the Judaizers who thought that their justification before God was determined by Law-keeping. They may simply be nomists – that is, people who think that their *sanctification* is determined by Law-keeping.

If you think about it, at least two of Paul’s epistles – Romans and Galatians – are addressed to Gentiles who have, in effect, placed themselves under the Torah. They have become partakers of the history of Israel, but they need to be pastorally encouraged to “go all the way” and experience that history as it has reached its definitive completion and fulfillment in Christ (Rom. 8:1-4). This is a message that all nomists in all ages need to hear.

Romans 8:15: “You have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again.”

“It is the inestimable privilege, as well as the indispensable duty, of all who have believed through grace to be ‘dead to the law’ as a covenant of works. To be dead to its *relatively*, or *with respect to their state*, is their exalted privilege; and to become dead to it *really*, *in the disposition of their minds*, is their bound duty ... As the believer’s living unto God, according to the law as a rule of life in the hand of the Mediator, is the necessary consequence or fruit of his having become dead to the law as a covenant of works, so his being dead to the law is necessary to his living unto God; so absolutely necessary that were he not dead to the law as a covenant, it would be utterly impossible for him to live unto God in conformity to the law as a rule.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> John Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel*, pp. 215, 236-7.

**Sermon 10:  
The Spirit’s Fulfillment of the Law  
4-14-02**

Last week we looked at Romans 7:7-25. We saw that the passage isn’t autobiographical but redemptive historical. Romans 7 is Israel’s history personified. It describes Israel’s experience of frustration under the Mosaic covenant. The people of God knew that the Law of God was holy and righteous. But they found that they were totally incapable of living up to its demand for perfect obedience. The Law therefore, while good in itself, served as an opportunity for sin to become even more sinful, thus sealing Israel in a state of hopeless enslavement to the reign of sin and death.

But thanks be to God for chapter 8:1: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” The key word “now” signals a redemptive historical transition from the old age to the new. It is an eschatological “now” – just like in Rom. 3:21: “But now, apart from the Law, the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed to by the law and the prophets.”

Verse 1 teaches that there has been a dramatic change in redemptive history, a transition from wrath to grace, from “condemnation under the Law” to “no condemnation in Christ.” The transition from the old covenant to the new is a transition from condemnation to no condemnation.

But you object, would Paul speak in such radical terms? Doesn’t Paul teach in Romans 4 that Abraham and David, two old covenant saints, both knew the joy of “no condemnation in Christ Jesus”?

The answer is that the contrast is covenantal and corporate. In terms of the experience of Israel as a corporate entity, as a nation in covenant with God – the old covenant was characterized by condemnation due to Israel’s state of being “in the flesh.” This is not to deny that individual saints in the OT were saved and justified in the Spirit. It is simply pointing out the overall experience of Israel as a nation under the Law. It was an experience that led to covenant curse, exile, and death, thus making necessary a new covenant inaugurated by Christ in the eschatological age of the Spirit. Israel is God’s disobedient servant. Israel failed under the covenant of works. Only God’s beloved Son, who was born under the Law, fulfilled its requirements and took away its curse.

**Structure**

This brings us this morning to Romans 8:1-4. Notice how this paragraph fits into the overall structure. Go back for a moment to 7:1-6, which is Paul’s thesis statement concerning the Law. Verse 5 describes the situation under the Law, in the flesh. Verse 6 describes the situation in Christ, in the Spirit. So you have this contrast then between two ways of serving God: the old covenant way, under the Law, which is characterized by the arousing of sinful passions; and the new covenant way, in Christ, which is the true service of God in the Spirit. Verses 7-25 is an expansion on verse 5, and 8:1-4 is an expansion on verse 6.

**Verse 1**

The word “condemnation” here is a judicial term. It is negated: “no condemnation,” or more accurately, “not any condemnation.” This absolute verdict of “not any condemnation” stands in sharp contrast with the “much condemnation” experienced by Israel under the Law in chapter 7. There was much condemnation for Israel under the covenant of works. Since Israel was in the flesh, Israel could not avoid being enslaved into further helplessness under the covenant of works. The more Israel sinned, the more Israel was cursed, and the more Israel was cursed, the more Israel sinned. Truly, the Mosaic Law was a ministry of condemnation and death, as Paul states in 2 Corinthians 3.

## Verse 2

But in the new covenant, there is not even one iota of condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Why is this the case? Paul answers in verse 2: “Because the law of the Spirit of life has, in Christ Jesus, set you free from the Law of sin and of death.”

This verse has stumbled many commentators because Paul uses the word *nomos* or Law in two different senses. The law of the Spirit of life is the regulating and actuating power of the Spirit. The Spirit of life, in Christ Jesus, is what has set us free from the Mosaic Law which leads to sin and death.

“The Law of sin and of death” means the Mosaic Law as a covenant of works which was hijacked by sin and made an instrument of sin, leading to death. The Mosaic Law is not itself sinful or even directly the cause of sin. But when the covenant of works comes into contact with the flesh, when the Law came at Sinai and was placed upon a sinful people, the inevitable result was that sin increased and, under the covenant of works, the wages of sin is death.

From this hopeless situation under the Mosaic Law, Paul says, we have been set free in union with Christ, by the regulating and actuating power of the Spirit.

## Verses 3-4

Virtually all the major English translations supply the word “did.” E.g., the NAS reads: “What the Law could not do ... God *did*.” But the word “did” is in italics. That means it’s not really there in Greek.

When the word “did” is added, it implies that what the Law could not do is the thing that God did. What did God do? He sent his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and so condemned sin in the flesh. Therefore, we infer, what the Law could not do was to condemn sin, to pronounce God’s judgment upon the flesh and thus do away with it. That is certainly true. But it isn’t the point Paul is trying to make.

Here’s my literal translation: “In view of the inability of the Law, weak as it was through the flesh, God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and to deal with sin, condemned sin in the flesh, so that the righteous requirement of the Law would be fulfilled in us.”

The thing that the Law could not do, then, was to enable us to fulfill its righteous demands. This has been spelled out for us in the preceding chapter. In Romans 7 Paul has demonstrated that the Law’s demands were righteous – the problem was that the Law had no power to enable Israel to meet those demands. It was simply an external code engraved on tablets of stone. But it couldn’t change the heart of God’s people. It could *demand* righteousness, but it could not *produce* righteousness.

Read 7:21-24, 25b

What the Law could not do was to empower us to obey it. This makes perfect sense, doesn’t it, of the qualifying statement: “What the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh.” The weakness of the Law, the inability of the Law, was a weakness, an inability created by sin. If weren’t for sin, the covenant of works could have been kept. But due to sin, the Law as a covenant of works comes along, and demands perfect righteousness, but because of sin, it hits a wall, so to speak. It hits the wall of the flesh, that is, the fallen Adamic humanity enslaved under sin in the old age.

Therefore, if the righteousness that the Law demands is going to be produced within us, something has got to be done about the flesh. Thus, God sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and in order to deal with the flesh. Having identified himself with our fallen condition in Adam, Christ then took that flesh to the cross, where he bore the just judgment of God, the fullness of God’s wrath poured out upon the flesh

as borne by Christ. Thus, the flesh has been dealt with. It has been decisively judged and taken out of the way.

Romans 6:6

#### Verse 4

Now that the flesh, which was the obstacle to the fulfillment of the Law’s demands, has been taken away, the Law’s demands are met fully in us by the Spirit.

It is crucial at this point to notice that the fulfillment of the Law that Paul is dealing with at this point is not the active and passive obedience of Christ. That is indeed a most precious truth that Paul deals with elsewhere – e.g., Romans 10:4, “Christ is the fulfillment of the Law that righteousness might be given to all who believe.”

But here, Paul is not dealing with Christ’s substitutionary fulfillment of the Law but the Spirit’s fulfillment. This needs to be unpacked.

Notice that the Spirit’s fulfillment is the fulfillment of “the righteous requirement of the Law,” not the Law per se. Christ fulfilled the Law itself, the Law as a covenant of works that demanded perfect obedience. The Spirit fulfills not the Law as a covenant of works, but the basic requirement of the Law for righteousness, the core ethic of the Law when viewed apart from its character as a covenant of works. It is similar to the idea of general equity of the Mosaic civil law, mentioned in WCF 19:4. The Spirit causes the fundamental intent of the Law to be satisfied.

Further evidence that the Spirit’s fulfillment is not a purely legal or forensic concept, is the phrase “in us.” “That the righteous requirement of the Law would be fulfilled in us.” This calls to mind the prophesy of Jeremiah concerning the coming new covenant. In that new covenant God would write his Law upon the hearts of his people. There is an inward aspect here. The inwardness of the new covenant. The contrast between the externality of the Mosaic code, and the internality of the Spirit’s work.

Then we come to the second half of verse 4: “who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

It is very important that we not misunderstand what this contrast between the Flesh and the Spirit means. The single most important thing you need to grasp is that the Flesh-Spirit contrast is not an anthropological dualism. It’s not as if the flesh is your sinful nature, that part of your nature that causes you to sin. Nor is the Spirit your good side that is under the control of the indwelling Spirit.

Rather, Flesh and Spirit are what Vos calls atmospheric concepts. They are Paul’s terms for the two ages. The Flesh is the old age under the sway of the first Adam. The Spirit is the new age under the second Adam’s covenant headship.

It follows, then, that the Flesh-Spirit contrast is absolute. There is no such thing as a Christian who struggles with the Flesh but who is also in the Spirit. You’re under one covenant head or the other. Now it is true that the two ages overlap in the present time. This creates a tension in the Christian life between the already and the not-yet, and our ongoing struggle with sin is part of that tension. But this overlapping of the two ages is a very different thing from an anthropological dualism, which tends to put your good side and your bad side on an equal footing. In view of the atmospheric or two-age conception of the Flesh-Spirit contrast, we must say clearly and without hesitation that all who are united to Christ are in the Spirit. They are not in the Flesh.

Romans 8:9-11

You see it is absolute. If you belong to Christ, you are not in the Flesh. This makes perfect sense, because Paul had already stated in verse 3 that this was the very purpose of the incarnation of God’s Son. God sent forth his Son, causing him to be made in the likeness of sinful Flesh – in other words, causing the totality of the Flesh under the covenant headship of Adam to be rolled up in Christ, so that Christ then took it to the cross, and there he judged it decisively, causing the old age under Adam to be done away with. The present age, the age of the Flesh, is certainly still in existence, and it will be until the second coming. But judicially, it’s death has already been secured. It is already on the way out. The Flesh therefore has no more power over us. It’s grip has been broken, and we have been transferred out of this present age into the glory of the age to come, that is, into the realm of the Spirit who *is* the age to come.

And so you see what Paul is saying. This very fact that the Flesh has been abolished in the incarnation and cross of Christ, is what has transferred us into the new realm of the Spirit, so that we are now possessed by the Spirit. And this fact of our being possessed by the Spirit, this new life that has been effected by the realm transfer of the cross, this is what constitutes the Spirit’s fulfillment of the Law’s righteous requirements in us.

This isn’t anything that we have to do in order to make the Spirit’s fulfillment of the Law effective! We don’t even have to walk in the Spirit! The concluding line in 4b is not a condition of the fulfillment of the Law but the result. It is purely descriptive. Paul has not yet gotten around to the imperative, to exhorting us to walk in the Spirit. He’ll get to that in verses 12 and 13.

At this point, he is describing the paradox of God’s method of fulfilling the Law in his people. When the Law was placed over them as a demand, as a set of stipulations to be kept, what happened? Israel couldn’t keep it! All they could do was transgress it. But when God sent his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and judged sin in the flesh, and poured out his Spirit upon us, thus setting us free from the Mosaic Law, what happens? The righteous requirement of the Law is now fulfilled in those who have been transferred into the new realm of the Spirit.

Notice that Paul does not say, “You as a Christian should go out and try to fulfill the Law.” Rather, he says, “You as a Christian are united to Christ. As such, you possess the Spirit of life, which has set you free from the Law. And paradoxically, even though you aren’t going out and attempting to keep the ten commandments, yet by virtue of this glorious fact that you are possessed and claimed by the Spirit, the righteousness that the Law demanded but could not produce – that very righteousness has now been fulfilled in you.”

Paul never says that Christians are obligated to “do the Law,” or “keep the Law.” Paul does use those verbs, but always with reference to those who are under the Law. For example, in Rom. 2:25, he says that circumcision is of value to the Jew, but only if the Jew *practices* the Law. But Paul never says this in connection with Christians.

With Christians he uses a different verb – the verb fulfill. You see this not only in Romans 8:4, but in 13:8-10: “He who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law ... love is the fulfillment of the Law.”

It is the paradoxical contrast between what the Law demanded and what it actually produced. Paradoxically, it demanded righteousness, but produced only sin. By the same token, notice the paradoxical contrast between what life in the Spirit demands and what it produces. It does not demand that we keep the Law – remember, the law of the Spirit of life has set you free from the Mosaic Law of sin and death – and yet, paradoxically, the result is that the righteousness demanded by the Law is actually fulfilled in us.

Paul teaches that those who are free from the Law are the only ones who truly “fulfill” the Law. The law of the Spirit of life has set you free from the Law of sin and death. This realm-transfer from the old covenant to the new occurred via the incarnation and death of Christ, when the Flesh was judged and

removed. Now you are in the realm of the Spirit. And this transfer into our new state in the Spirit, is how God has done that the Law could not do.

Why is this “end run” around the Law necessary? Because of the flesh! As long as the flesh is something that we must deal with, we cannot please God by keeping the Law. The flesh plus the Law equals frustration, sin, and death. The whole equation had to be changed. The flesh had to be judged, thus uniting us to Christ by his Spirit, and placing us under the sway of a new power, so that we are no longer under the Law in the flesh, but alive to God through Jesus Christ in the Spirit. Only by means of this radical new equation, a drastic reworking necessitated by the flesh, can the righteous demands of the law ever be fulfilled in God’s people. In this way, the promise of the new covenant prophesied by Jeremiah has been fulfilled. God has written the Law upon our hearts by taking us out of the realm of the Flesh and placing us into the new realm of the Spirit.

**Sermon 11:  
Summary and Review**  
4-21-02

Review chapters 5-7

What does it mean to walk in the Spirit?

This is a difficult concept for us. It seems vague and abstract. Part of the reason it seems that way is that we don't experience the Spirit with the same vividness today as the early church seems to have. But even though we don't have the same experiences of speaking in tongues, and so on, let us never forget that the Spirit is real. When our Savior had accomplished purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high, and he poured out the Spirit into our hearts.

Verses 5-8

First of all, walking in the Spirit is not the same thing as being according to the Spirit. All believers are “according to the Spirit.” They are no longer “according to the flesh.” A once for all transition from the realm of the flesh to the realm of the Spirit has occurred. We were once under the headship of Adam, under the old age of sin and death. But Christ came, judged the flesh, and transferred us to his headship as the second Adam, under the new age of life.

Second, walking in the Spirit is defined here as setting your mind on the things of the Spirit, as opposed to the things of the flesh. The things of the flesh are death and hostility toward God and his righteous Law. Those who are in the flesh are therefore totally incapable of pleasing God.

But you are not in the flesh. You are in the Spirit. Therefore, you are able to set your mind on the things of the Spirit – namely, life and peace. “Life” here means eschatological life, the eternal life of heaven that has been inaugurated already. To set your mind on life, then, means to set your mind on heaven.

What about “peace”? Peace is the opposite of hostility toward God. Formerly, when you were in the flesh, as Paul says in 7:5, the sinful passions were aroused by the Law. You rebelled against the Law of God and hated it. You agreed with Satan, “It is better to reign in hell than to serve God in heaven.”

But now your heart has been subdued by grace. You are no longer at war with God. You are at peace. You love God. You love his righteousness, his glory. Your greatest desire is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. You want to serve God.

Verse 9

The presence and power and reality of the Spirit dwelling in you is nothing less than Christ himself dwelling in you. If you do not have the Spirit of Christ, then you do not belong to Christ. Conversely, all those who belong to Christ have the Spirit. It is a package deal. Christ and his Spirit are inseparable. To have one is to have the other.

The Spirit is the Spirit of the risen Christ. He is the comforter that Jesus spoke about in the Upper Room with his disciples. Jesus said, “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Comforter, that He may be with you forever ... I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you” (John 14:16, 18). Jesus said, “I will come to you.” He has given us his Spirit so that we would not be alone, so that He himself, though he is seemingly far away, might be near. The Spirit is the very presence of Christ himself. Paul puts it like this: God strengthens us with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith (Eph. 3:14). And in 2 Corinthians 3:17, Paul said, “The Lord *is* the Spirit.”

Verse 10

Notice that instead of saying “The Spirit is in you,” he says, “Christ is in you.” But those are equivalent expressions.

Furthermore, he says that “the Spirit is life because of righteousness.” The word “righteousness” here goes back to 5:18 – Christ’s “one act of righteousness.” Christ as the second Adam has fulfilled the covenant of works by his righteousness. As a result of his righteousness, he has received the reward of resurrection life. Notice that the Spirit *is* the eschatological reward of life. Thus, Christ received the reward of the Spirit, the reward of resurrection life, not only for himself, but to give to his people.

If you want to know the power of the Spirit in your life, then you must look to the obedience and resurrection of Christ. Christ was obedient to death upon the cross. On the cross, Christ submitted to the wrath of God, and God judged the flesh once for all. As a result, the Spirit’s power has been released. Remember Ezekiel’s vision of the water of life flowing out from under the altar. In the book of Revelation this gets translated into the water of life from the throne of the Lamb that was slain.

Consider also the role of the Spirit in the resurrection.

Verse 11

The same Spirit who raised Christ from the dead, who gave Christ the reward of eschatological life, is dwelling in you. And that present life-giving power will one day give life to your mortal body, when your body will be glorified at the resurrection.

Verses 12-13

Therefore, you have an obligation – not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh, but to the Spirit, to live according to the Spirit. What does it mean to live according to the Spirit? It means to put to death the deeds of the body. Putting to death those sins that characterize the flesh. It is repentance (Shorter Catechism # 87 – p. 875):

Sorrow for sin  
Confession of sin  
Resolving to walk in new obedience

Verse 14

This is the same thing as being led by the Spirit. The word “led” here has the connotation of the Spirit’s control over us. You know how when you sin, you feel like you cannot rest? This isn’t just a psychological phenomenon of guilt. It is the Spirit. The Spirit impels you to repent, the Spirit impels you to want to serve Christ. You cannot escape. That is what it means to be led by the Spirit.

Verse 15

You have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again – in other words, you are not under the Law, which leads to bondage and fear. This inward sense of the Spirit’s control as he impels you to repent and mortify the deeds of the body, is not a spirit of slavery and fear. It is nothing less than the Spirit of Christ, the self-same Spirit who cried out “Abba, Father” when Jesus was in the garden of Gethsemane. When he faced the most difficult trial of his life, even when his human soul naturally shrank from the fearful prospect of drinking the cup of God’s wrath – then the Spirit came to him and ministered to him, so that when he cried out to God he cried out, “Abba, Father.”

So too, the mortification of sin is fearful. It is painful. It is not the course that we naturally want to go. We naturally want a life of ease. But the pathway to heaven isn't sitting in first class. It's a pilgrimage in the wilderness. And in the wilderness we face hardship. We get thirsty and hungry. But the Lord provides the manna in the wilderness day by day. He provides us with his Spirit to comfort us, the Spirit who is the downpayment of heaven, the foretaste of the promised land.

And as we are ministered to by the Spirit, we find that in spite of the tribulations, in spite of the difficulty of battling with sin – the Spirit is still there in our hearts, causing us to go to God as to a Father, to go to him in the same filial spirit as Jesus himself, who called God his Father. And the fact that we find ourselves calling upon God in the self-same terms that Jesus did in his trials, that is what serves as testimony that we are God's sons.

Verses 16-17

So what does it mean to walk in the Spirit?

1. To set your mind on the things of the Spirit – eternal life and peace with God
2. To put to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit – repentance and new obedience
3. To cry out “Abba, Father,” in the midst of trials and tribulations, knowing that you are God's son in Christ

Aside from verse 12, the bulk of this passage is descriptive. Paul is describing what is like to walk in the Spirit. All who are Christians, all who belong to Christ, live this way. And those who live this way, they are the ones in whom the intent of the Law is fulfilled by the Spirit.

Paul never says that Christians must “keep the Law.” He says, rather, that Christians are people who walk in the Spirit, who are led by the Spirit, who set their minds on the things of the Spirit. They are a heavenly people, who toil as pilgrims in the wilderness, on the way to the heavenly city. Such people, by their very lifestyle, are those in whom the righteousness demanded by the Law is fulfilled.