

Saved to Serve in the newness of the Spirit

Today we come to Romans chapter 7. Here in this chapter we get an extremely personal look at the life of Paul. He turns to personal pronouns in this chapter as he describes the effects of sin and the battle with sin in the life of the believer. Today we will see him beginning to speak of his personal testimony of how sin brought about death in his life, and next time, Lord willing, we will see how sin still effects his life after being saved. Let's read our verses for today and prepare our hearts for God's Word, after all this is not just an academic exercise to learn about God, but rather it should be the process by which we submit ourselves to Him and conform to His image.

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.

Pray

Computers are tools that most of us can hardly imagine living without anymore. Life, of course, was not always like this; there was actually a time when people did not have computers in their homes, and certainly they did not carry them around in their pockets like we do today. The processing capabilities of the machines today are quite amazing. You have probably heard it said that the average smartphone today has more processing power than the capsule that took men to the moon. However, there are some things about these machines that can be frustrating. They do not always work as they are supposed to, in fact sometimes they can take on a life of their own it seems. But, this is usually a function of what the person operating the computer has put in. When something bad goes in, something bad usually comes out as well... garbage in equals garbage out. Also, computers have a tendency to become obsolete, and in these days of innovation; they do so quickly. Computers that were purchased even just a year ago are already unable to run some new software, and those that were purchased several years ago are almost completely obsolete. They can still operate using old programs, but anything new and up to date renders the computer into a fancy paperweight with a keyboard. Well, computers are similar to the Law when it comes to our spiritual lives. If we are trying to use the Law to serve the Lord today we are attempting to use an outdated, obsolete machine that is incapable of doing the job, and we will see that today,

hopefully in our passage. This does not mean that the obsolete computer is bad, however, but rather it has just been rendered obsolete by a new and better way.

United with the Risen Christ

Here in the beginning of the chapter Paul uses a new analogy to show our position in Christ. In chapter 6 he used slavery as the picture of how we serve the Lord. Now, he uses marriage to show this, and not just the concept of marriage, but rather, the idea of remarriage after the death of one of the participants. Of course, this analogy does a perfect job of showing how we were united to one husband in the past, but now that union no longer exists, and we are now united with another. Verses 1-3 show the analogy. **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.** This reminds us of the type of audience that Paul is writing to here. These aren't backwards pagans who have been living in the wilderness their whole lives, like the Druids in Britain or something. These people were sophisticated, intelligent individuals who were living in the city that was essentially the capital of the world. He says in verse 1, "for I am speaking to those who know the law". They were educated people. This does not mean the law of Moses here, but rather the law in general, the principle of the law. Remember most likely, the majority of the people in the church were Gentiles. There were some Jews there, but the Jews had been exiled from the city, and were only recently allowed back in at the time of Paul's writing. Rome was a nation of laws; it was a civilized nation, and these were civilized people that Paul was writing to. They were civilized, but they used to be lost in their sins just the same, and Paul is here using the law to show their new position in Christ. Notice verse 2 it says **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.** At the end of the verse we see the phrase, she is released from the law concerning her husband; this shows that Paul is actually speaking about the law in general, not the Mosaic Law. The law of the land is clear, and Paul points out here that if the woman's husband dies she is free to marry another man. And, that is precisely what has happened to us in Christ. We have died to one husband, and have been joined to another, one who is so much better than the former, and that is what we see in the following verses.

In the NASB verse 4 starts with the word "therefore", but the following verses are really just more of a comparison than based on what came before. The ESV says **Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.** So, like the woman whose husband died, we died to the law in the body of Christ. This is once again describing our position in Christ, and here it reinforces the purpose for our position in Christ. But, let's go back to the beginning of that verse and really see what Paul is describing here, because this is so

important. We know it is important because he is spending so much time talking about it, and repeating the idea to make sure that we get it. He has used multiple examples to really drive the point home that we are joined to Christ, and therefore we should act a certain way. Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ. First, he reminds them that they are his brothers in Christ; in fact they are his brothers on the basis that they have died through the death of Christ. We have seen all through this letter how this is accomplished. The topic of faith is weaved through this entire letter whether it is stated outright, or implied like it is here, faith is the prominent theme of the letter. Here we have died to the law through the body of Christ by faith. The word for “you have died” literally means, “put to death”, or executed. Remember Romans 6:6 **knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin.** Well, here we have been crucified with Christ so that we could be joined to another. Remember also that we associate ourselves with the death of Christ by faith. Notice it says the body of Christ, this brings to mind Christ’s dead body, by faith in the sacrifice of Christ we have a secure position in Christ, we have a righteous standing, we have peace with God, and we have access to God like we learned in chapter 5. All of this is through faith. But, now the metaphor is that of marriage. We die to one, so that we can be joined to another. If you remember our two masters from the last time, we had one who was dressed like he was ready to go out on the town, that was sin; and we had the other who was dressed like He was ready to work in a garden, that was the Lord. All people are joined to sin at one point in their life. Romans 3:23 says “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” That means that all people are, in the words of our metaphor today, joined to sin. Today, instead of presenting ourselves to one master or the other, we are married to one or the other. And, here in verse 4 the implication is that we are all first married to sin, but through the death of Christ we can then be married to another, by faith. It says, “Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to Him who has been raised from the dead.” So, now we have died to the law through the death of Christ, by faith, so that we could have a new husband, and that new husband is the Risen Lord. The word for “be joined to”, or “belong to” is an interesting one as well.

Be joined; Be Born

The NASB says in the middle of the verse, “so that you may be joined to another.” The word for “be joined” is γενέσθαι. It’s root meaning is “to be born”, or “to exist”, or to be in a close relation to someone. It is interesting that this word means both to be born, and to be married to someone, and that Paul would use this metaphor in describing our position in Christ. This is especially true in light of what Christ Himself said on this topic. If you remember His conversation with Nicodemus, He said that in order to see the Kingdom of God one must be born again. The words for “born again” and to “be joined” too are similar. The word in Romans 7 is to be born, while the word in John 3 refers to the actual event of being born. But, what I really want you to see is that in order to be born again of the Spirit, one must die in Christ, through faith. If you turn over to John 3 we can see what Christ is saying there. **1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; 2 this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can**

do these signs that You do unless God is with him. 3 Jesus answered and said to him, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.

4 Nicodemus *said to Him, How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mothers womb and be born, can he? 5 Jesus answered, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Christ is talking about the same thing here that Paul has been throughout Romans. Notice that Nicodemus comes to Christ by night, it almost seems like he is hoping that no one else sees him, and he immediately says that obviously Jesus is a special person, because if He weren't, He wouldn't be able to do all those miraculous signs. But, Christ cuts right to the chase; He doesn't even say thank you for the compliment, He just goes right to Nicodemus' spiritual condition, and that is that he is lost; he is joined to sin through the Law, like we all were according to Romans 7. Christ tells him though that he must be born again if he is to see the Kingdom of God. In the words of Romans 7, "he must be joined to another." In verse 4 Nicodemus shows that he really doesn't have any idea what Jesus is talking about. The Jews were very concerned with the physical and outward displays of righteousness, and that showed in their extreme legalism, and it still shows today among the devout. Nicodemus did not see that Christ was talking about spiritual matters, He was talking about having the right position with God, and being spiritually right with Him. Nicodemus was concerned with physically doing things for God, like all the Pharisees. They were concerned with the Law, and following it with their bodies, and not paying much if any attention to their heart. In verse 4 Nicodemus asks Christ how he could possibly be born again of his mother. Notice the emphasis on the physical. But, Jesus was concerned with the heart, with the spiritual, and He says in verse 5, **Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.** Unless we are born of the spirit we cannot enter the Kingdom of God, we cannot be saved, or to use the language that Paul uses in Romans, we cannot have a righteous standing with God. So, in order to be joined to another, we must first be born again of the Spirit.

Joined with Christ to bear fruit for God

Now, we can go back to Romans 7 and let's look at the end of verse 4 and we will see the reason that we are joined to another, or the purpose for being born again. If we adopt a man centered view we would just think that this is all for our benefit. And that really does miss the point. The world is not man-centered. The Bible is not man-centered. It is God centered. We really do need to adopt this viewpoint, or we will be pretty miserable in this life. God does not save us for our own good, if that were the case when we put our faith in Him, He would just take us out of this world, and we would spend eternity with Him right then. That isn't the way it is though, He doesn't just take us away, we are left here for a purpose, and we see that purpose in the end of verse 4. Once again, 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.** We are joined to the Risen Christ, in order that we might bear fruit for God. We are saved for a purpose, and that purpose is

sanctification. The process by which we bear fruit for God is sanctification. That is such an easy phrase to just pass over, “in order that we might bear fruit for God.” But, really that is the whole point of the Christian life, everything else is just details, to use a phrase of Einstein’s, I believe it was. Einstein said he wanted to know the mind of God, everything else is just details. Well, here the really important thing is bearing fruit for God since that is why we are joined to Christ. Really that is the whole reason for all of this. Christ died for the sins of the world so that people would put their faith in Him, and that they would in turn be changed and bear fruit for God, all for the glory of God. He didn’t sacrifice Himself for our benefit, but rather so that we would bear fruit for Him, and so that God would get even more glory. There is a theological term for this idea, and it is the “doxological centrality” of God and His Word, or sometimes you might hear it referred to as the “doxological purpose”. God does everything for His glory. God is the center of the universe, not us. God is the center of the Bible; He is the main theme, not us and our salvation. Everything is here for His glory, and when we realize this, our lives are much easier to understand. So often we will flounder through life not knowing why God has us in a particular place, or going through a particular trial. But, when we step back and realize that this is all for His purpose, we should understand that there is so much more to life than our situation, and our problems. I hesitate to look forward in the book of Romans too much because I’m afraid of stealing my own thunder in the weeks to come, but in the next chapter we see one of my favorite verses in the whole Bible, and it is Romans 8:28 **And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.** God causes “all things”, we don’t cause them, God does. And we see here that we are joined to the Risen Christ so that we can bear fruit for God. We aren’t joined to Him for our own benefit. We aren’t joined to Him so God can enjoy our presence for the rest of eternity. We are joined to Him in order that we might bear fruit for God. And the only way that we can bear fruit for God is to be sanctified, which is to be holy. Like we saw last time you cannot be joined to two masters. If we are joined to sin, we cannot work in the garden of our lives, we cannot live a holy life, we cannot bear fruit for God. We are joined to the Risen Christ for the express purpose of bearing fruit for Him, for the express purpose of living a holy and sanctified life. So, we need to keep this in mind as we go about our Christian lives. And does it even need to be said that we live our Christian lives all the time? We don’t just live them at church on Sunday, or when we are teaching the kids, or when we are reading our Bibles, but we live our Christian lives all day – every day. So, this purpose that we have, to bear fruit for God, needs to be in the front of our minds at all times. We should question ourselves always as we go about our day. Is this activity bearing fruit for God? Does this thought help me to bear fruit for God? And if we are yielded to the Holy Spirit, if we listen to Him when He talks to us, and convicts us of sin, I guarantee that you will do a better job of bearing fruit for Him.

Life before being joined to Christ

Now in verse 5 Paul looks back to the life of a person before he is saved. Remember that people only have one of two masters. There were only two choices in chapter 6 of whom we can present ourselves to, to be our master. Here there are only two possibilities of spouses. We can either be joined to the Risen Christ, or we can be joined to sin. Here he is talking about the time when these people were still in the flesh, or joined to sin, a time

when they were still slaves of sin. **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.** There are a couple things to notice here before we really get into this verse. The first is that it is in the past tense. “For while we *were* in the flesh...” This is before the act of being joined to Christ, which we have seen is done by faith. This is before putting one’s faith in the death of Christ. Now, this is important to see, because later on in the chapter Paul talks about the battle that goes on with the flesh in the present tense. We will get into that more later obviously, but I just wanted to kind of set the stage for that now, and get you to realize the difference between these two sections. This verse, verse 5 is past tense, while verse 14 and following is present tense. This is speaking of what the flesh did before we were saved, and later on Paul talks about how it is still able to operate in the life of the believer. The next thing I want you to see is the use of the personal pronoun here in verse 5. He says “For while *we* were in the flesh...” This is the beginning of Paul’s personal testimony with his battle with sin after being saved by the Lord. Before it was all kind of academic. He has pointed out that all people are sinners, and that the only way to be saved is to have faith in the death of Christ. Then, he went on to show how when our faith is properly placed in Christ, then we have certain benefits, peace, access, and a hope for the future in God. Then Paul talked about how our position in Christ should affect the way that we live. Now, though we see that he starts to shift into talking about himself, and the intense battle that he has with sin and the flesh. We get just a hint of it today, but later in the chapter Paul’s personal battle with the sin nature is the focus. **For while we were in the flesh,** this implies that they are not in the flesh now, they have been born of the Spirit, like Christ talked about in John 3. He said **That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit** in John 3:6. So, that which is only born one time is flesh; that is the natural man. If you have never been born again of the Spirit, then you are a natural man, a fleshly man, or like Paul says here, “in the flesh.” Another way of saying that is “unsaved.” If you have not been born again by the Spirit through faith in Christ, then you are in the flesh, unsaved, you do not have a righteous standing with God, you do not have peace with God, you do not have access to God, you do not have a hope for the future with God. You must be born again of the Spirit or none of this matters, none of these benefits apply to you. Here in this verse we see how sin operates in the unsaved person. It says **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.** This is the first indication of how sin and the sin nature really operate, and just how evil it is. Notice it says the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law. This is a difficult section to translate because the term *aroused* is not in the original. It literally says, “the sinful passions, through the Law, were at work in the members of our body.” Basically it means that the sinful passions, the sin nature uses the Law to cause us to sin. Now, this term for sinful passions is an interesting one as well. The word for passions also means sufferings, and “sufferings” is the way it is used in the NT the majority of the time. It is only translated as passions one other place, and that is in Galatians 5, which we will get into in the next verse. There is a great connection between Romans 7 and Galatians 5 that we will see in verse 6. But, for now, isn’t it interesting that this word for “passions” also means “sufferings”? That is so appropriate, because our sinful passions cause so much suffering. This is something we should keep in mind as we go about our daily lives as well. This goes along with

realizing that we aren't the center of the universe as well. Our actions have consequences. We can't just give into those sinful passions and expect that there won't be any suffering. Our sin causes problems period. We don't just operate in a vacuum. When we get out of the will of God, and start operating in the flesh, we cause suffering, and most of the time that suffering is in the lives of innocent bystanders. So, we need to realize that, we need to keep it fresh in our minds. Our actions affect other people, our sin causes real suffering for other people, and obviously that is outside the will of God. Back in this verse though we see that the sinful passions, which is the sin nature, that thing inside us that we all have from Adam, used the Law to get the members of our bodies to bear fruit for death. Even though this is specifically talking about the time before Paul was saved, literally when he was still joined to the master of sin, it can still apply to us now. Like we saw last time, we can still choose to go with the master of sin and leave the garden that God has us working in, but our gardens will show the result. Our lives will eventually be indistinguishable from a lost person, but we do have the option of living that way. So, we can apply this to our lives even after we are in Christ, because God doesn't hold us in a bubble, we are able to operate in the flesh as a Christian, and we will see that in great detail in the second half of this chapter. There is a key to not operating in the flesh, however and that is in Galatians 5.

Walk in the Spirit

The key to not allowing our sinful passions to work in the members of our bodies is to walk in the Spirit. Look at Gal 5:1 **It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.** Christ set us free from the bondage of sin; this is the death that we see in Romans 6 and 7. We are set free from the bondage of sin through the death of Christ. Christ set us free from the bondage of sin, so stand firm, and do not go back to being a slave of sin again. So, don't go back to the master of sin once you have been set free from him. Here, in Galatians, Paul says that Christ set us free from that so that we would be free. The master of sin is a wicked taskmaster who drives his captives on to worse and worse sin, like we saw in Psalm 1 last time. Christ sets us free from that; He is a gentle master who lovingly guides us into wanting to obey Him and wanting to live a life that is pleasing to Him. There is an implication here that this is a choice of sorts. **It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm.** It seems that you could choose to not stand firm; in fact that is what the Galatians were doing. They were not standing firm, and Paul called them foolish at the beginning of chapter 3. But, here Paul says to stand firm, and do not be subject to a yoke of slavery. We definitely need that message today as well. We are surrounded by sin, practically on a continual basis, it seems our whole society has just completely given over to the master of sin; so many people don't even try to hide it anymore. But, we are instructed to stand firm, like a soldier guarding the last piece of ground that they need to hold. It is as if we are at the Alamo, holding onto the last piece of ground for the Lord that we can control. We need to stand firm and protect ourselves from the evil that is all around us if we expect to not come under the yoke of slavery again. And, make no mistake that this battle is primarily won or lost in the mind. We need to stand firm in our minds against the schemes of the Devil to keep from being taken captive. Like we will see later in the chapter, this is warfare, and we are in it whether we like it or not, and you have two choices. You can either not fight, and

certainly be taken captive by sin, or you can stand firm like Paul says here, and not be subject to slavery again. Let's skip down to verse 16 and we will see the key to not becoming subject to slavery again, **But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.** If we walk by the Spirit we will not carry out desires of our sin nature. If we walk by the Spirit we will continue to work in the garden of our lives, we will pull out the weeds of sin, we will prune our plants, we will get rid of things that distract us from serving the Lord, we will water our plants with the Word of God, and our gardens will look good. If we aren't doing these things, it shows, and eventually the weeds will choke out the plants, our sin will take over, and we will not bear any fruit for the Lord, which as we saw in verse 4 back in Romans 7 that was the whole point of Him saving us. So, stand firm; guard your mind from this evil world like you are at the Alamo, it is warfare whether you want it to be or not. Then, walk by the Spirit, confess your sin, stay focused on serving the Lord with your life, and make sure you are walking according to His word, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh, or be subject to the yoke of slavery again. Another key to all of this is found in verse 24 of Galatians 5, and this is where we see the word for passions from Romans 7. **Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.** We need to remember our position. This is why Paul spends so much time talking about our position in Christ in Romans, and in fact in most of his writings. Our position is in Christ. Our sinful body, our sin nature, has been crucified with Christ, so it is now powerless. It does not have the ability to rule over us anymore if we are in Christ. If we are subject to sin now, after having put our faith in Christ, it is by choice. You are choosing to live a life of sin if you are doing it after having put your faith in Christ. Sin has no power over you now; your sinful body has been crucified with Christ so you are no longer subject to its sinful passions. We do not need to live in bondage to sin any longer, because our position in Christ is secure, and our sinful flesh is rendered powerless.

Serve in the newness of the Spirit

And we see that back in Romans 7 and 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.** We have been released from the Law through the death of Christ. When we put our faith in Christ's atoning death we are no longer subject to the Law. The Law of God is kind of like the spiritual warfare that goes on around us. We are subject to the Law whether we know it or not. We are subject to it whether we choose to be or not. It is like the laws of a nation. We all live in the state of Michigan, so we are all subject to the laws of this state whether we choose to be or not. In fact, some times we even have a choice about laws; we get to vote on them. And, if the side that we chose doesn't win we are still subject to the new law after the vote. The Law of God is like that; people are subject to God's law whether they want to be or not. But, here we see that we are released from the Law when our faith is in Christ (who fulfilled the Law, and was the sacrifice once for all according to Heb 10:10). And we are set free to serve in the newness of the Spirit, not in the oldness of the letter. We are set free from the Law it says. This is the same as we saw back up in verse 6 of chapter 6 **knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; 7 for he who has died is freed from sin.** We are crucified with Him so that our old body is done away

with. If you remember it was rendered powerless, and that is what sin is here in verse 6 of chapter 7; it is rendered powerless. We are released from the Law since we have died to that which held us captive. The sin is what held us captive, our sin nature, and now we have been released from that which the sin nature used to hold us captive, the Law. And now we are set free to serve in the newness of the Spirit, and not the oldness of the letter, or in some versions like the ESV, RSV and the NIV it says the written code. Either way it is speaking of the Law. Now we serve in the Spirit instead of by the Law. And that word for oldness is really important here. It doesn't just mean an old way, or an old fashioned way. It literally means an obsolete way. So, that way does not work, it is obsolete. It is like the old computer that is unable to run the new programs anymore. This computer is so old it doesn't have the ability to go on the Internet anymore even; it is completely obsolete. But serving in the Spirit is like having the latest computer that can run every program, and it does it at lightening fast speeds. The beauty of this computer is though that it will never be obsolete. It will never go out of style, or there will never be a program that it can't run. It is kept updated by the Holy Spirit Himself. If we walk in the Spirit daily He keeps the hard drive of our minds up to date with the latest software. Also, when we walk in the Spirit our minds are protected with the latest anti-virus software as well. If a false gospel comes along we can spot it a mile away. If it is not in line with what we read in the Bible, if it is not Christ and Him crucified, it is a false gospel, and our anti-virus software from the Holy Spirit keeps it out. There is one more thing that a good computer has, and that is filtering software. When we walk in the Spirit our computers are protected from all the filth that is in the world. The Holy Spirit will protect the computers of our lives from the schemes of the Devil, and the evil that is so prevalent around us. But, like we saw earlier we need to stand firm, this isn't just an automatic thing. We cooperate with the Lord in progressive sanctification. We have our position automatically when our faith is in Christ, but we have to stand firm in our commitment to Him, and we do that by walking in the Spirit, and daily living in submission to His Word.