

Romans

Dr. Charles "Buddy" Parrish
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Romans 7:1-6



Vss. 1-3

- You get the feeling in this passage that Paul certainly knows what he wants to say, but kind of circles around a bit to get to it. The great British theologian, CH Dodd suggested that here it might be best to go around what Paul said and focus on what he meant.
- One of the arguments that Paul was widowed points to how often he uses marriage as a metaphor to help us better understand our relationship to God. Here Paul combines marriage and the Law of Moses to make his point. First, speaking to the Jewish members of the church and to the Gentiles known as "God-fearers" who also knew the Law, he reminds them that the Law has authority over them as long as they live. Thus in marriage, a woman is the wife of her husband until one of them dies. If she leaves her husband or her husband leaves her and she marries another, then she is a bigamist and an adulterer. But if her husband dies, then she is released from the Law and she is free to marry whomever she chooses.
- The point Paul is making here is that once, we were married to Sin. Now, Sin has been put to death by Christ. Therefore, we are now free to be married to Christ.

Vss. 4-6

- But here Paul puts it another way: it is WE who have died! We have died to the Law. Recall in Ch. 6 Paul's beautiful illustration of how in baptism we are physically acting out the Spiritual reality that we have died with Christ, we have been buried with Christ, and we have been raised to a new life in Christ with Christ. Our old life is dead and that old life included the Law. Now that life is over. We have been born again, born from the top down. We are new creatures in Christ and as such we are free of the Law. We live under Grace, not under the Law.
- Paul says in vs. 7 that "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". Paul regularly identifies that time in our lives when we were apart from God as the time when we were "in the flesh", as if our own body was our god and we were slaves to its desires. Obviously even after

we are baptized we still have a physical body. We still have flesh. This dichotomy always left open a door for a heresy like Gnosticism that argued that even after we were saved nothing we did in the flesh mattered; that all flesh and every material thing was inherently evil since the Fall of Adam; therefore people could do whatever they wanted in the flesh, for only the Spirit was saved, not the body; but this is not even close to what Paul was saying. Paul and John in particular fought against such heresy. "The flesh" for Paul, was that part of human nature that detached itself from God. Thus, in our detachment from the Divine, we had the Law, and in this Law were many things that were forbidden which only served to make them more appealing. Forbidden fruit is always more appealing, they say. So Paul repeatedly states that the Law inadvertently produced sin and left us permanently at the mercy of sin's seduction.

- "But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter."
- Here Paul turns to our life with Christ. Here our life is NOT ruled by a set of laws which may actually lead to sin, but now we live in a love-relationship with Christ, with His Spirit in us and we in Him. It is this relationship, this love, that determines how we live day to day. Love, not Law, defines our life. This is the new life that we have been raised from the dead with Christ to live.
- It is like when a young Christian couple are in love but still dating. There are rules to follow. There are lines not to be crossed. And the longer they are dating the greater the temptation to break the rules and cross the lines. But then they get married and begin a new life together. Their old life of being separate and chained by rules is dead. Now they have a new life governed by love, not rules. They begin to grow together so that the two become one. So it is also in our new life with Christ. We no longer live by rules but by His Grace which is poured out from His love. We are free. Free to go and do and be within His Grace wherever and however that may be, "so that we serve in the newness of the Spirit".