

Introduction: On April 14, 1865, President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated by John Wilkes Booth at Ford's Theatre in Washington, D.C. Booth's role in the Lincoln assassination has never been seriously questioned. He was a well-known actor at Ford's Theatre, a fervent Confederate sympathizer, and there were many eyewitnesses to the crime. Nonetheless, he was never arrested, never tried in a court of law, never convicted and never sentenced for the assassination. The reason? Booth was himself shot and killed 12 days later in a Northern Virginia tobacco barn, where he was hiding, by a Union Army Sergeant who acted against orders that Booth be taken alive. The moment John Wilkes Booth died, the law no longer had any power over him. The law only applies to living people.

In Romans 6, Paul made the point that if we are in Christ, we are dead to sin and alive to God. Here in Romans 7, he'll make a related point: We are also dead to the law and alive to Christ.

- I. Dead to the Law, Alive to Christ 7:1-6
- II. Paul's Own Experience with Covetousness 7:7-12
- III. The Law Is Good, but the Law Cannot Transform Us 7:13-25

- I. Dead to the Law, Alive to Christ 7:1-6

A. 7:1 We can all understand his point: The law rules over us as long as we live. Once we die the law's power over us comes to an end.

B. Paul uses marriage as an illustration.

i. 7:2 Just to clarify: In those days women couldn't divorce their husbands. Terribly unfair, I know, but as divorce wasn't an option, it could not clutter up his illustration as long as we place ourselves in the woman's position.

ii. 7:4 In this case, the husband, the law, isn't going to die. Even Jesus said:

Matthew 5:17-18 (NKJV) ¹⁷"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. ¹⁸For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

Since the law isn't going to die, we need a way to get out from under it. The alternative is that **we die along with Christ on the cross**, our "marriage" to the law ends, and we are free to marry the resurrected Christ – so we can now be His bride.

C. 7:6 You may find Paul's marriage illustration a bit awkward. Maybe the story of John Wilkes Booth help a little bit. Or just focus on this verse.

A new birth means dying to the old life. If we are truly born again we belong to Christ. A new life has begun. Everything changes. We no longer need to be preoccupied with the law because our standing before God is no longer about our performance. Paradoxically, our performance actually improves as we let the Holy Spirit take control.

A. Now that he's made his point, he wants us to understand that there is nothing wrong with the law itself. **The law is not our enemy; sin is our enemy.** What's wrong with any of these commandments in the law?

- i. "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18).
- ii. "Honor your father and your mother" (Ex 20:12)
- iii. "You shall not murder." (Ex 20:13)
- iv. "You shall not commit adultery." (Ex 20:14)
- v. "You shall not steal." (Ex 20:15)
- vi. "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." (Ex 20:16)

The law is not our enemy; sin is our enemy.

B. Paul drills into the commandment against covetousness. This is the one that got him.

- i. As far as the law went, Paul did a pretty good job of keeping it.

Philippians 3:4-6 (NKJV) ⁴though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: ⁵circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; ⁶concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

- ii. But covetousness was a problem, because this particular commandment digs down deep into our hearts. You can imagine Paul the Pharisee working through this.
- iii. Paul was a lot like the rich, young, ruler. When Jesus asked him about murder, adultery, stealing and loving his neighbor, he could reply by saying, "All these things I have kept from my youth." (Matt 19:20) Then Jesus asked him to give up his possessions, and the young man went away sorrowful.
- iv. Without the Tenth Commandment, without the law, we might never understand the sin of covetousness, we might never even know it was wrong.
 - a) We might have thought sin had only to do with outward behavior.
 - b) Covetousness touches the heart and mind, the places other people never get to see.

C. Sir Francis Bacon once said, "Knowledge is power." Regarding sin, he would be wrong. The law provides **knowledge of sin without power to overcome it.** The law can never make us acceptable to God. The problem, however, is not in the law, but in us.

D. So what good is the law anyway?

- i. It reveals God's standards for a righteous life – in contrast to our natural tendencies.
- ii. It convicts us of sin, which gives us the opportunity to ask God's forgiveness.
- iii. It forces us to trust in the sufficiency of Christ as we become painfully aware of our sin.
- iv. The law cannot possibly save us, but after we have become Christians, it helps us to understand what God desires. We then have to rely on the Holy Spirit to live that out.

III. The Law Is Good, but the Law Cannot Transform Us 7:13-25

A. The Greek philosophers spoke of an internal conflict between the reason and the passions. Jewish teachers spoke of a conflict between the good and evil impulse. Either could identify with Paul's contrast between his mind or reason—knowing what was right—and his members in which passions or the evil impulse worked. (See IVP Bible Background Commentary)

B. 7:15, 19 Compare with Galatians 5:17 below:

Galatians 5:17 (NKJV) For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

C. Paul is not making excuses. He wants us to show us how powerful sin really is. We tend to underestimate both the **power of sin** and the **power of God** to help us defeat it.

i. This will be our experience any time we attempt to please God without the Spirit's help. We all know what this is like. All of us have tried to defeat sin in our own strength.

a) If I rely on willpower alone, I can eat an entire pizza myself.

b) The same goes for any sized bag of potato chips. I can devour the whole bag alone during a single football game – while coveting the things on the commercials.

Conclusion: 7:24 – 8:1

Paul asks the right question here: **Who** will deliver me?

- The answer is not in finding the right set of rules and regulations or exerting greater effort to keep the law – though, again, the law itself is good.
- The answer is not in finding the right book to help us deal with our problem, though books can obviously be an excellent way to gain knowledge and increase our understanding.
- The key, the solution, the answer, will always be to stop trying to overcome sin with human willpower. We must first get our focus off of ourselves and get our focus on Jesus Christ.
- In Romans 7 Paul intentionally places the focus on himself rather than Christ or the Spirit
 - In Romans 7, Paul uses the words “I”, “me” or “my” in 20 of the 25 verses
 - In Romans 7 “Christ” or the “Spirit” or “He” or “Him” appear in only 3 of 25 verses.
- In Romans 8 the ratios are reversed:
 - In Romans 8, we find “I”, “me” or “my” in only 3 of the 39 verses in the chapter.
 - In Romans 8 “Christ” or the “Spirit” or “He” or “Him” appear in 23 of the 39 verses.
- As we take the focus off of ourselves, we must take hold of the enormous power of Christ available to us. This is God's provision for victory over sin—he sends the Holy Spirit to live in us and give us power. And when we fall, he lovingly reaches out to help us up and get us right back on track again.

Galatians 5:16-18 (NKJV) ¹⁶I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

¹⁷For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. ¹⁸But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.