

Discharged from the Law

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Preacher: Megan Curlis-Gibson

[0 : 0 0] be good if you could keep your um bibles open romans chapter 7 let's pray lord god thank you for your word thanks for all that you have revealed to us about yourself that we're not left in the dark concerning you or the way to you please open our hearts and open our minds to your truth this evening and change us by your holy spirit we pray in jesus name amen well the first time i was asked if i was a christian i didn't really know what to say i was 14 i'd been a christian for a couple of weeks and my friend sally was taking me to my first bible study group ever and we were walking across the courtyard of the church and we saw two other girls from my school who i didn't hang out with all the time but i knew and so we stopped and said hi and one of the girls just blurted out with this kind of incredulity are you a christian now i was really embarrassed i didn't grow up in the church and and i'd i'd only like a couple of weeks ago prayed to receive jesus and i i fully believed that he was lord but i really didn't know what i'd kind of got myself into and my basic understanding uh was that i'd kind of just joined up to be on god's team and i'd agreed to play by his rules and by that stage i didn't even know what all the rules were and i didn't want to sound kind of up myself and so uh my answer to this girl was something like um i'm trying to be and i've thought about that answer a lot over the years because i think it says a lot about uh what i thought being a christian was back then and and i think for a lot of us um maybe something that resurfaces time and again in our christian lives yes jesus died to save us but but as a christian our job is to obey god's law if we're on his team we've got to play by his rules we've we've kind of signed on the dotted line of this contract oh yes out of joy out of recognition that jesus is lord and savior but our understanding sometimes is and mine was i think then that god wants us to be good people and that to bear fruit for him we've got to be about obeying the rules about the law we have a legal obligation to fulfill his law but is that the way that god intends us to bear fruit for him my continued question i think for many of us will rules bring about righteous living how should the christian view the law of god well if you haven't been here for the last couple of weeks we're working through the apostle paul's letter to the roman church and we're up to this chapter seven and this question about rules and about the law in the life of the christian is really really important to paul now he's been writing to the church in rome to encourage them in the gospel the good news about jesus he's reminding them and explaining to them how the gospel is the power of god for salvation both for jewish people those who've grown up with the law of moses from the old testament as well as for gentile people

non-jewish people who haven't been taught about god's rules from the scriptures and he's explained already that it doesn't matter whether you're a jewish person or a non-jewish person god has a punishment stored up for you because you and everyone else have sinned we've wanted to be in charge of our own lives and we've done lots of things that are the opposite of how god wants us to live what it means to have sinned but now paul says now jesus has come and this is the best news ever because when we've got faith in jesus the death that he died actually takes the place of that punishment that god had waiting for us jesus took our punishment and we are now given a right standing before god our debt has been paid in full we are free and it's a gift and it although it was a gift that was costly to god meaning that he had to become human and die on a cross die a criminal's death this gift is free to us and we simply receive it by faith that's what paul has been explaining to the roman church and then he says okay given our new right standing with god by grace through faith if you believe in jesus that he died for you you've got this right standing but how does that affect your life how do you now live can you just go on doing whatever you like knowing that christ's blood will kind of cover anything that you do wrong can you just live like a sinner no he says and that's what we've looked at over the last two weeks in chapter six no you can't go on as you used to because something has happened to you when you put your faith in jesus when god granted you that faith you're not the same when you have faith in jesus it's not just an intellectual thing or even a behavior thing that you need to say i'm trying to be it's an identity thing it's a i am thing something amazing happens to us when god grants us faith in jesus it's like all of a sudden we're wrapped in this white sheet and uh we're new we're kind of born again but that's not the end of the story it's like god has kind of turned this uh spiritual overhead projector on and uh jesus life and death and resurrection his whole jesus whole time on earth and his death for us and resurrection is like projected onto us onto this kind of white sheet that's wrapped around us whatever jesus did we get the credit for whatever jesus experienced it's like we've experienced it too whatever god sees when he looks at jesus and jesus life that's what he sees when he looks at us the obedient life that jesus lived that pleased god that is now our life and we please god because of jesus life on us the death that jesus died to pay for our sin that's our death now too we've paid the price in him we've died to sin in him and that resurrection that victory that eternal life that jesus has that jesus won that is ours now too

in part now and absolutely fully when we die when we go to heaven when jesus returns we're still us i'm still megan known and loved by god but i'm in christ i'm megan in christ and all of christ's merits have been credited to my account his life is mine his death is mine his resurrection is mine and so paul says you've got to think of yourself differently completely differently he says in romans 6 verse 11 you must also consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to god in christ jesus so then as people who are right with god but who are dead to sin and free from having to sin because we're in christ it might seem then that this is the perfect opportunity for us to go ahead and finally fulfill the law i mean after all it's kind of god's gold standard isn't it i was reading the other day that over the last couple of years there's been a big push in the um us by christian groups and uh jewish groups to get the ten commandments displayed in public places and to educate people about the ten commandments because uh if they know the ten commandments they figure if they know the law of god then the society will start to look more like it the society will start to reach that gold standard if people know what the ten commandments are and perhaps the jewish christians who were part of the church at rome were hoping that this is where paul was kind of going with his argument you know perhaps some people had been teaching them that uh to be a a real christian you needed to be a law keeper as well maybe they were trying to convince the christians there that weren't of jewish background uh that there were things that they needed to do to try to be good christians kind of like my idea when i first became a christian stuff i needed to do and i couldn't really say that i was doing it all so i guess i'm just trying but right in the middle of chapter six paul says something completely shocking for sin will have no dominion over you since you are not under law but under grace that's verse 14 in chapter six to a jewish person how could that make sense how could paul link sin and law how could he tell people that sin would have no dominion over them because they're not under law wasn't the law the thing that kept you on the right track wasn't paul being completely irresponsible i mean wouldn't releasing people from the law uh be like kind of removing the bars from the cages in the zoo i mean it might take the panda a little while to work out that you know he could get out and start crushing things by sitting on them and eating you know lots of bamboo or something but it wouldn't take the puma very long at all i mean he's been pacing up and down waiting waiting for a chance to get out and if we remove the law won't people be the same some might take a little while some will be out of there ready to sin ready to do what's wrong and so if we're dead to sin paul surely that's exactly when we should be applying the law that's

exactly when we can truly sign up and say yep i'm going to play by the rules now i'm going to be a law keeper well paul says no you can't turn to the law now you can't turn to it for motivation you can't turn to it uh as the rule of the uh to keep you as a christian because in christ you're actually dead to the law as well romans chapter 7 verse 1 do you not know brothers and sisters for i'm speaking to those who know the law that the law is binding on a person only during that person's lifetime if you watch um csi or uh law and order you will know that no one is happy at the end if the criminal is found dead or they had to shoot them in a stakeout thingy or if the if the criminal has has taken their own life grisham's not happy horatio is not happy detective goran is not happy why because the law is binding only during a person's lifetime and no justice can be done no law can be brought to bear upon the criminal anymore once they're dead and so there's a sense of real uh dissatisfaction of frustration if that's how it ends you can't punish them you can't punish their family or pin the arrest warrant to their tombstone the law has no more power over someone who has died or in a more positive sense consider the legal contract of marriage in a wedding the vows sound beautiful and poetic and everyone looks lovely but they're actually spelling out the terms of a contract between the man and a woman i megan take you phil to be my husband to have and to hold from this time forward for better for worse for richer for poorer in sickness and in health so long as we both shall live legally we live together from today legally the changing circumstances of our future life together won't make these promises invalid but if one of us dies we are legally released from these vows and this is the apostle paul's own illustration in verses two and three isn't it thus a married woman is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives but if her husband dies she is discharged from the law concerning the husband accordingly she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive but if her husband dies she is free from that law and she marries another man and if she marries another man she's not an adulteress in the same way my friends you 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 the main point of this illustration is so clear isn't it just like in christ you've died to sin that he took chapter six to explain in christ you've died to the law it was a till death do us part law and in christ that has happened death your death in christ has parted you from the law but this illustration is a little bit tricky if you were noticing it you might have thought oh it's not quite working because in it the person who survives is the kind of focus of the analogy

and so paul is saying the wife is now free to belong to another to marry someone else and so just as paul uses that illustration he's saying we're kind of like the wife as well as the husband so he's i think you'll be able to see that he's using the illustration in three ways firstly that there was a valid agreement between specifically jewish but more broadly all people and the law before christ that couldn't just be dismissed we're bound to the law secondly death changes a person's relationship to the law as we've already said and then thirdly paul develops the analogy a bit more to put us in the place of the spouse that's left alive to show that death to the law has taken place for a specific purpose death to the law that we might belong to another and bear fruit for god why did we need to be released from the law god's gold standard for living in order to bear fruit for god well paul says because just like matches and petrol sin and law were an explosive deadly mix verses 5 and 6 while we were living in the flesh our sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit for death but now we are discharged from the law dead to that which held us captive so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the spirit have you ever felt have you ever seen a keep off the grass sign and felt absolutely compelled to step off the path did you only ever feel like reading your school english novels after the exam was over have you ever seen a child reach for the only thing on the bench that they're not allowed to touch have you ever seen school kids with wallets full of cash shoplifting two dollar chocolate bars this is the human sinful nature or what paul calls the flesh reacting exploding with law sin is first and foremost it's the i'm in charge i'm the boss i know what's best for me i'll decide on my own personal code of ethics it's rebellion and paul says it bears fruit for death when it combines with the law when the spark of sin hits the petrol of law there is an almighty explosion in the human spirit and death is the result so why did god even make the law if it was going to be so dangerous it really seems to me like the law is a bad thing not this kind of gold and silver and sweet honey and wisdom and light that the old testament describes it as you know you can have a look at psalm 19 psalm 119 well paul starts to answer that criticism in verses 7 to 13

[20 : 17] and we'll look at them briefly now and a bit more next week as they relate to the second half of the chapter but let's read them what then should we say that the law is sin by no means yet if it had not been for the law i would not have known sin i would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said you shall not covet but sin seizing an opportunity in the commandment produced in me all kinds of covetousness apart from the law sin lies dead i was once alive apart from the law but when the commandment came sin revived and i died and the very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me for sin seizing an opportunity in the commandment deceived me and through it killed me so the law is holy and the commandment is holy and just and good did what is good then bring death to me by no means it was sin working death in me through what is good in order that sin might be shown to be sin and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure what good function was the law designed to have here paul says to show sin for what it is the lord does show the gold standard the life that god wants and what god expects from his creation and for this reason it is holy the commandment is holy and just and good as paul says in verse 12 but to show how the commandment identifies sin paul chooses the tenth commandment you shall not covet you find the commandments in exodus 20 you shall not covet your neighbor's house you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or male or female slave or ox or donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor coveting means to desire something that someone else has and to want it for yourself it's a bit like jealousy mixed with greed and sprinkled with a bit of lust

I want I should have why do they have it and not me his car her clothes his partner her body should be mine and the particular thing about coveting I think in Paul's choice of it here is that coveting is the only commandment that tenth commandment is the only commandment that's describing that's describing a sin that's completely internal it's kind of obvious to your neighbors if you are worshipping and bowing down to an idol or if you are running off and committing adultery or if you're stealing or murdering but it is possible that only you know if you're coveting certainly it can come out in words and actions but for many people many of us in this society even today it remains in the heart and we just kind of function like it's normal or acceptable to feel that way it's even encouraged by ads magazines you want that but the law of God reveals that it isn't normal it isn't acceptable it's actually sin to desire to have what is not ours and to grasp for what we haven't been given and to not trust God to provide what we need theoretically then the commandment is a very good thing identifying this kind of cancer of internal sin so that we can remove it but instead of the law enabling a person to get rid of their internal covetous desires by identifying them as wrong shining a light on them before we are in Christ the law always gets hijacked by our sinful nature and suddenly more of these desires spread up spring up the little cancer of covetousness starts to metastasize all over the place because of our sinful nature our rebellion you're telling me this is coveting well I'm going to do more of it we are slaves to that when we are not in Christ before we have faith in Christ the law cannot but simply make it spread because sin reacts with the law no matter how many times we teach people the ten commandments if they haven't died to sin they can't obey them and if they have died to sin they've actually died to the law as well the old way is no longer binding and it is no longer the motivation to right living the law was never able to function as a means to holiness and it can't function that way in the

Christian's life either rules can't bring righteous living only the spirit can do that so if you were reading along with me you would have noticed that we skipped over a bit verse 6 but verse 6 has one of those awesome but now bits I think I'd like to go through Romans and just look for all the but nows it'd be a great thing to do on a rainy Sunday afternoon how encouraging but now we are discharged from the law dead to that which held us captive so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the spirit this is the language of the promised new covenant isn't it it reminds us of the promises of God in Jeremiah 31 or

Ezekiel 36 where God reveals his absolutely mind-blowing solution to our sinful rebellious exploding with law human nature he would one day give us new hearts write his law on them and give us a new spirit put his spirit in us so that we could do all that was written on our hearts on that day we wouldn't need to be instructed by the law to know God because we would know him on that day we wouldn't need to be prodded to obey we would desire to obey because we're new people motivated by hearts that are transformed to love God this is new covenant language and it's fulfilled in Jesus that's what

Paul is saying here pure and simple that promise that is fulfilled in Jesus when you have died to sin died to the law you have a new heart a new spirit and that is how you bear fruit to God imagine a little boy whose mom is always telling him to wash his face wash his hands comb his hair and he hates it and he's always wriggling and writhing under the comb and he hates it when mom comes at him with the face washer or the wet hanky and he just avoids the bathroom at all costs there is nothing that can make him go in there it's like for some perverse reason he just wants to be grubby and this just goes on for years I'm not a parent but you might have experienced this if you are and then something happens you can't get him out of the bathroom the door is always locked he's always in front of the mirror putting the gel in you know shaving the like three hairs he's got on his cheeks so then he's got an excuse to put the aftershave on you know he just he can't get out of there it is a complete transformation he's standing there yeah hi in front of the mirror what's the difference he's in love he's in love he's met the girl of his dreams and now it's not his mum telling him to wash his face and comb his hair he wants to he wants to because something inside of him has changed he is in love and he wants to please someone in whom he takes great pleasure in the same way friends we who are made new in Christ by God's spirit we start to want to serve him because we love him someone is not dragging us by our ear coming at us with a face washer licked no it's from the heart because God has given us his spirit and has released us from sin and the law we are no longer slaves to those things we have a new master like Wayne was saying the most wonderful beautiful master

[30 : 55] Christ who sanctifies us himself who gives us his spirit to make us love him more each day this is the power of the gospel the law can't make good people it can't make good Christians but the gospel can Jesus can when we have faith in him he makes us new from the inside out to bear fruit for God let's pray Lord our God many of us have been trying to live for you by rules and regulations and by pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps even those of us sometimes who know that we're saved by grace Lord Jesus would you transform our thinking tonight would you transform our wills tonight to be slaves to righteousness to be motivated by newness of spirit because that is actually what we have in you thank you for the amazing transformation that we have that we are when we are in Christ help us to understand it more and more and help us to seek you with all our heart that our minds might be renewed by this truth and we might live for you bear fruit for you from new hearts new spirits Amen Father friend so that drawing to yourself .

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