

NOW WE BELONG TO JESUS

Romans 7:1-25

Key Verse: 7:4

“So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God.”

In the last passage we learned that by believing in Jesus, we were united with him in his death. Our old sinful nature died with Jesus at the cross. We are now freed from sin. We can have victory over sin in our daily lives. Moreover, we have been united with Christ in his resurrection. The Risen Christ lives in us. Now, we can share in his broken shepherd heart for the world. We can share his victorious reign and enjoy a powerful new life. It is truly amazing. Someone said that there is nothing new under the sun. But there is something new. We are new creations in Christ Jesus. We are dead to sin and alive to God in Christ.

Today, Paul instructs us further about our new life in Christ. In Christ, we are freed from bondage to the law. Now we belong to Jesus. We are under grace. Some think this means no more struggle. Quite the contrary, we must struggle intensely. But we do not struggle in vain. We struggle to realize the depth of our sin, and the marvelous grace of Christ, which is deeper still. Then we can grow strong in the grace of Christ. We can enjoy God's peace and bear much fruit.

First, now we belong to Jesus (1-6).

In the previous passage, Paul had mentioned our new relationship with the law, saying in 6:14, “For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.” Now Paul picks up on that theme. Look at verse 1. “Do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to men who know the law—that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives?” Paul was speaking to Christian brothers in Rome, many of whom came from Jewish backgrounds and were familiar with the law. The “law” refers primarily to the Ten Commandments. But it also refers to the entire body of Scripture that governed men in their relationship with God. Paul's point is that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives. When we accept Jesus by faith, we die with Christ. Therefore, we are freed from the law.

Paul explains this with an illustration from marriage. Look at verses 2-3. “For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man.” Legally speaking, the marriage commitment ends at death. Young Johannes Brahms loved Clara Schuman, the wife of his teacher, Robert Schuman. As long as Robert lived, Brahms did not say anything to Clara; if he had, he could be accused of adulterous behavior. Still, he expressed his affection by loving her many children. He probably composed his famous lullaby for them. One day, Robert Schuman died. Then Brahms was free to make his heart known and proposed to Clara. To his surprise, Clara refused to marry him in order to devote the remainder of her life to making her husband's music famous. The point is that Clara was legally free to marry Brahms, if she had wanted to, because her marriage with Robert ended at his death. But Clara refused because she was a woman of only one love, like UBF women.

Look at verse 4. “So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God.” Now Paul applies the truth directly to our Christian lives. When we died with Christ, we died to the law. Therefore, our relationship with the law ended. We are no longer under the bondage of the law. Now we belong to Jesus Christ, who was raised from the dead.

It seems appropriate to expound on the analogy of marriage. We can say that at one time we were married to Mr. Law. Though we worked hard to serve Mr. Law, he never said, “Thank you.” Mr. Law always looked serious. He was intolerant and very strict. Mr. Law had no sense of friendship, not to mention romance. Though we worked hard all day long, he only noticed what we failed to do and rebuked us for it. Even though we shopped wisely for groceries, haggling and sweating, he said sternly, “You spent too much money.” We worked hard, only to be

condemned. As the sense of condemnation grew, we became powerless. We could not but lay down in bed, under constant condemnation, until we became mentally ill. The end result was death.

On the other hand, belonging to Jesus is like being married to Mr. Grace. Mr. Grace is forgiving and embracing. Though we lost our keys one after another, first the house key, then the garage key, van key, car key, office key, and safe deposit box key, Mr. Grace did not get upset. He said, "Honey, it is okay. I made another one for you. Here it is." Though we burned dinner again, he would say, "Honey, it is okay. I really like burned food." Though we bounced seven checks in a week and accumulated many bank charges, he said, "Honey, it is okay. I covered everything. Here is some pocket money for you." Mr. Grace is always forgiving, tender, kind, affectionate and sacrificial. He always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres (1Co 13:7). Marriage to Mr. Grace makes us stronger over time. It makes us grow in love and in the character of Christ until we become like him.

Look at verse 4 again. "So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God." Our new life with Christ is indeed a happy one. But its purpose is not just for our happiness. It is to bear fruit to God. It is to reveal God's glory through his work in us. For example, there is Shepherdess Tami McHugh. She was once a dreamy girl, like one from a fairy tale. In her innocent and naive state she fell into the devil's snare and sinned against God. The power of sin brought condemnation and death. She could have become a woman of tragedy. But through her shepherd, Missionary David Kim, she began to study the word of God. She met Jesus as her true husband. She received the grace of forgiveness of sins and married Jesus. Then she married the very handsome Shepherd Rob McHugh and established a house church. During the last five years, she has managed to finish medical school while serving five students per week through one-to-one Bible study. She has also borne two lovely children. This week she graduated as Dr. Tami McHugh. More remarkable than her accomplishment is her inner growth as a woman of godly character. Indeed, she has borne fruit to God. How was it possible? It was by the grace of the Risen Christ. At her graduation, she confessed that God helped her when she held on to 2 Corinthians 12:9a, "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'" Praise God for his good work in Dr. Tami McHugh. May God raise many more women of God like her in establishing North America as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

It is so wonderful to think about those who bear fruit to God. On the other hand, there are those who bear the fruit of sin. Look at verse 5. "For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death." One man engaged in homosexual activity. It was out of a rebellious spirit toward his father—more than that, toward God. He contracted HIV and later got AIDS. When he discovered he was dying, he should have repented like the robber on the cross. Instead, he became more evil. He intentionally tried to infect others with his disease. He bore fruit for death. This is true of anyone controlled by the sinful nature.

Look at verse 6. "But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code." In the past, we were bound to the law. It followed us everywhere, pronouncing condemnation. It was like Inspector Javert in Victor Hugo's novel, "Les Misérables." Inspector Javert pursued Jean Valjean doggedly, determined to send him to prison. There was no escape. But in Christ, we died to sin and we died to the law. Thus, we are free from the law. Now we live under grace. We live in Christ. We no longer struggle merely to obey the written code and then receive condemnation. Instead, we have a life-giving relationship with the Risen Christ. This is possible through the Holy Spirit, who lives in us and empowers us to serve God day by day.

Now we belong to Jesus. We are his bride. Therefore, we must commit our lives to him absolutely. But some people retain their "bachelorette's mentality" even after marriage to Jesus. They are still looking around, to see if there is a better candidate than Jesus. There is no better candidate than Jesus. Let's commit our lives fully to Jesus, who died on the cross and rose again to give us new life.

Second, the law is holy and we are sinners (7-13).

Look at verse 7. "What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, 'Do not covet.'" Some people cannot discern between the power of sin and the law. Some think that the law is sin and the

law is bad. One young man had a Bible teacher who helped him realize what sin was. Soon the young man began to dislike his Bible teacher because he felt condemned whenever he saw him. In fact, it was because he remembered his sin. We must know that the law is holy and we are sinners. The law exposes sin to lead us to repentance.

Paul was an eminent Pharisee. He was well disciplined to keep the law. However, there was one commandment that he could not keep: "Do not covet." Through this commandment Paul became conscious that he was a sinner. At one time, he was alive apart from the law. He thought he was okay. But in his heart was the power of sin. When the commandment, "Do not covet," penetrated his heart, the power of sin became active and began producing every kind of covetous desire. He must have coveted positions of honor, academic achievements, someone's wife, someone's donkey, and so on, until he was nothing more than a bag of covetous desires. In verse 11 he says that sin deceived him. Sin promised happiness, pleasure and peace. But sin produced death. In fact, the power of sin is so thoroughly evil that it used the law to put Paul to death. We must know that the law is holy. It is sin that makes people evil. The law exposes sin like an x-ray or an MRI. Therefore, we should not dislike our Bible teachers for exposing our sins. Instead, we must acknowledge our sin, repent, and thank God for our Bible teachers.

Third, victory in Jesus (14-25).

In verses 14-25, Paul shares his personal struggle with sin and the way to victory. Some scholars think this describes Paul before conversion. A simple reading of the text indicates that it was after conversion. Through his struggle, Paul came to know the universal truth about man and that only Jesus saves. Paul saw that man is good and evil. Mencius, a Chinese philosopher, advocated the "inborn goodness" of man. Soon Ja, however, insisted on the innate evilness of man. Both lacked universality; neither could explain the antithesis: If man is good, why is the world full of evil, and vice versa? We must know the universal truth that people are both good and evil. One lady married a man because he was very gentle while dating. Later she found out that he was devious, unfaithful, and a drug trafficker. She divorced him after three months. We must know that God alone is good; men are good and evil.

How is it that people are both good and evil? On one hand, man is made in the image of God. So in his inner being he delights in God's law (22). He knows that the law is spiritual and he has the desire to live according to the law (14,18). He wants to do good. He really does. But what he does is not the good he wants to do. Instead, he does evil things that he hates to do. It is because the power of sin is working in him, making him do what he really does not want to do. American soldiers wanted to liberate Iraqi people from the oppressive rule of Saddam Hussein. When the war began, the American public was well informed of all the atrocities committed by Hussein, his sons and his henchmen. Now it is becoming evident that some American soldiers have mistreated Iraqi prisoners. They have done the same thing that they hated to see Hussein do. They wanted to be liberators, but they actually became oppressors. It was not they, but the power of sin in them. Man is man because he has the most splendid dreams that he wants to fulfill; man has the highest desire to do good. But his total depravity does not allow him to do so. That is why he loves to read beautiful stories and watch movies about noble humanity. But after doing so, he does not imitate the good things he has seen. Instead, he does evil things that he really does not want to do. It is because sin lives in him.

Paul's description of his condition is vivid. He was like a prisoner in his own body. Look at verses 21-23. "So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members." We understand Paul very well. In our hearts, we want to do good. We want to feed many sheep. We want to be faithful to early morning prayer. We want to prepare for the 2004 UBF International Summer Bible Conference at MSU with all our hearts and strength. We want to study hard and master our field of study for the glory of God. But when we want to do good, evil is right there with us. Instead of doing these good things, we lay down to sleep or sit down to watch television or something else. When Paul discovered his own wretchedness, what did he do? Did he despair? No. He cried out to God. Look at verse 24. "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" The moment of discovering our wretched sin is the moment to cry out to God for help.

Look at verse 25a. "Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord!" Paul found victory, not in himself, but in our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul was totally helpless. But when he looked at Jesus, he found God's salvation for sinners. Paul simply believed in Jesus. Then Jesus forgave his sins and poured out the Holy Spirit upon him. The Holy Spirit enabled Paul to overcome his wretched self and serve God until he bore abundant fruit to God. Paul teaches us how

to overcome our wretchedness and live victorious lives. We must not look at ourselves. We must look at Jesus and ask his mercy and grace. Jesus is our victory.

In today's passage we learn that in Christ we died to the law. We are free from condemnation; now we belong to Jesus. Jesus governs us with peace and love and gives us true freedom. Jesus gives us his Spirit who enables us to bear fruit to God. Sometimes we feel utterly helpless because of our sins. We are tempted to give up the spiritual struggle. But at that very moment, we must cry out to God for his mercy and help. Then we can know the grace of Jesus all the more. Let's thank God for Jesus and live by faith in his grace day by day.