

The basis of good scriptural interpretation is context. That is going to be very important in Romans 7. In chapter 6 Paul asked this question:

¹⁵What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!

He first answers the question about why not to sin with a shock value type of statement in chapter 6. He essentially says that you are a slave to someone, and if you are Christ's slave it is absolutely impossible that you would continue being a slave to Sin. To even attempt it would be to put your status of being "under grace" in question. Now Paul goes on to actually answer the question with a reasoned out response. And he uses an illustration of marriage to make his point.

We have to keep in mind the question he is answering to get the full value of his answer. Shall we sin because we are not under the law?

Vs 1- Do you not know? This is "do you not know" number 3. **First**, don't you know that we really died with Christ? **Second**, don't you know that everyone shows up for service to His master and a believer shows up for service to Christ? Now **third, vs 1** "**Don't you know that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives?**" Not every human would know this. But the people Paul is addressing would. He clarifies this by saying, "**(for I speak to those who know the law)**". It looks like this is a departure from his total audience of Gentile and Jews so that now he is focusing solely on the Jews in his audience. We do know here that he is talking to an audience that he knows is clear about what the law says. I suspect that these were Jewish believers that were in danger of leading the new believers astray. It was always difficult for Jews to follow Christ without running back to legalism. Without doubt it would be difficult even for sincere Jewish believers not to make mistakes in this regard. But

Paul wants there to be no mistake. So he continues addressing these people who know the law.

I think too that it is important to keep in mind that Paul knows the Jewish mind. What he has said about the law up to this point in Romans is mostly bad. Any Jewish person would have a very hard time holding back a bias against Paul for what he has said. These were fighting words. These people were taught to love the law. They were taught that the law makes them special in contrast to the rest of the people of the world. The law was revered and precious to them. And Paul has had nothing but bad things to say about it. I think that Romans 7 is his way of making what he has said personal. It is his way of getting his audience to realize that, as good as the law is, it puts a sinner in a world of hurt. Chapter 7 is one of the harder chapters of the Bible to interpret. After verse 6 we will have a struggle on our hands. But I think it helps if we keep in context what Paul has said to this point and who his audience is. We will deal with more of this in future studies.

that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives?

A Jewish person might say "amen" at this point. Yes, the law has dominion over men just like it has for thousands of years. But Paul hasn't made his punch line yet. A Jew would easily agree that the law holds sway over a man's life, the law is king over a man as long as he is breathing. Yes, yes they would say. And they would temporarily think "we Jews are correct and Paul is wrong". "A man **is** still under the law so there is no issue." But Paul continues. His statement is actually intended to limit the extent of the law. In Jewish law or most any legal system, a contract with a person only holds as long as that person is alive. I know a man who died with credit card debts. He was no longer obligated to pay them when he died. That is the principle Paul first states. A dead man cannot be held to keeping the legal demands of the law.

Now Paul jumps to an illustration in life to make that point. He uses marriage. It is an illustration he uses to make just one point.

He says

²For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to *her* husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of *her* husband.

The single point he is making by the illustration is that death releases a person from the bondage of the law. If a woman is married and that man she is married to continues to live, a woman is bound by the law to remain under the subjection of that husband. There is however a principle that will set her free. Death. If the husband dies she is released from that bondage that she was under. The principle of death is a freeing principle. Death frees from the bondage of the law.

I think it was Ruth Graham who was asked if she ever considered divorce. She responded that she had never considered divorce but she had considered murder. She understood the point Paul was making.

³So then if, while *her* husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man.

Paul's audience would understand this. If the husband is alive, if there is no death, there is no freedom. As long as the husband is alive, the wife is guilty if she violates the bondage she is under. If she acts as if she is free from the law when she is not, she will be considered a law breaker. She will be an adulteress who is condemned before the law. She isn't free from the law. She is condemned by that law.

But if there is a death, if her husband dies, all bets are off. She is now free from that bondage. Now if she marries another man she has not violated the law. She is not condemned by that law.

There is no biblical law in existence that will condemn her or what she has done. Death makes all the difference.

⁴Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God.

The therefore is based on the fact that death frees from bondage to the law. Here is the point that the illustration is given to make. This is the difference that death makes. Death sets you free from the bondage of the law.

The Jew would have no trouble understanding his or her marriage to the law. They were brought up knowing its precepts, being taught them as the only right and wrong in life. They were bound to them from the day they were born to the day they died. We know that Paul is speaking to people informed about the law in this passage. We don't know if he would have said that all mankind was married to the law. At least I am not aware of any verse that makes that clear. We know without a doubt that his Jewish audience was married to the law.

And death sets you free from that marriage. They would have all agreed with this. They knew the marriage laws.

I want to point out here that this is not primarily a teaching passage about marriage. You wouldn't take this as a teaching passage on marriage any more than you would take a verse referring to a sunrise as a scientific explanation of the sun rotating around the earth. Paul is referring to something everyone is familiar with to make a point. There may be other points of the law, there may be methods of divorce, but everyone listening would instantly understand what he is saying about the law by the illustration he uses about marriage.

In the illustration Paul is referring to the husband's death that frees the wife from the bondage. But in this application it is **our** death through Christ that frees us from the bondage of the law.

When Christ's physical body died, we died with him in the same way that when Adam sinned we sinned with him. Now we are dead with Christ. And that has set us free from the law's condemnation. It can't call us an adulterer when we get married to Christ. When we leave the state of being under the law and move to being under grace, it cannot condemn us. Now we are no longer under the law, in the state of sin. We are now under grace as the bride of Christ. We are not in Adam but in Christ. These are all ways of describing the same thing. We are married to the one who was dead but was raised from the dead. Because of that we have new life and that new life must bear fruit. Note that this says, "That we should bear fruit to God". When we were married to the law we could not bear this fruit. Our past husband was incapable of producing this fruit in us. We did bear fruit and it is described in verse 5. We were bearing fruit to death. But bearing fruit to God is the purpose of our death to the bondage of the law and the rebirth in Christ. That is why we needed a new husband. We needed a husband who could produce this fruit in us. The Bible is consistent on this fact all through the New Testament. We are reborn to bear fruit. We are given faith for obedience. It is impossible to separate justification from godly behavior. Why? Because our death in Christ and marriage to Christ is specifically for the purpose of bearing fruit to God. That is what we are saved **for**. That is the intention of everything that goes before.

Let's take a look at how this word fruit is used in scripture.

The Greek word means

- 1) to bear fruit
- 2) to bear, bring forth, deeds
- 3) to bear fruit of one's self

I think sometimes we as Christians forget why God chose us. We forget that it is so that we will bear fruit to God. We

somehow begin to think that it is so we can enjoy our lives more. Or we can be rescued from the punishment we deserve. We forget that God has done this work to produce fruit in us for himself. I wonder if that isn't why we are often so void of joy. We think of life wrongly and we make decisions based on those wrong expectations and then are disappointed that things don't work out as we have planned. How would our lives change tomorrow if we were to actually believe I exist to bear fruit to God. I don't exist for my pleasure. I don't exist to meet everyone's expectations of me. I exist as a believer to be doing those things that are most central to God's heart. I exist to be His Servant carrying out His will, the will he has conveyed in scripture. I exist to be working on the things that last forever. I exist to bear fruit to God. How many things in our lives would change if we were to apply that single concept? How much of our discouragement and disappointment would be swept away by that reorientation of what life is for? I think this is a valuable application from this text. Other than the gospels and here in Romans this word for fruit is used in only one other text.

Colossians 1

3We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, 4since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; 5because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of **the gospel**, 6which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is **bringing forth fruit**, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth; 7as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, 8who also declared to us your love in the Spirit.

9For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; **10that you may walk worthy of the Lord,**

fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; 12giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. 13He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, 14in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. Here again we see the emphasis of why we exist- to walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing HIM, being fruitful in every good work. What do **we** think our lives are for? Do we need some re-orienting?

Now remember the original question. Why not sin if we are not under the law but under grace? The answer is found not in what we ARE NOT under but in what we ARE under. We are now married to Christ. It is not like we are left under nothing, separated from the law but roaming in a spiritual no-man's land. No. We have died with Christ and now we are in Christ, married to Christ. We are one with Christ. We have not gone from a state of sin to a state of neutrality. We have gone from a state of sin and condemnation by the law to a state of oneness with Christ and a freedom from the condemnation of the law. It is **WHOSE** we are that makes the question asked in 6:15 absurd. It is like a child of a miser being adopted by a benevolent billionaire asking the question, so why shouldn't I sit out on the street and beg? It is behavior that is incongruous to your new identity.

⁵For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death.

When we were in the flesh. Now what does this phrase "in the flesh" mean. I think we can best figure that out by eliminating what it cannot mean. The phrase, "in the flesh" cannot mean

only physical existence on this planet. It can't be saying that when **we were alive** on planet earth, the sinful passions were at work. It can't mean that in context because in verse 6 Paul says "But now we have been delivered from the law". We would have to be delivered while physically dead. We would have to die first to not be "in the flesh" if that is what "in the flesh" means. That, in context is impossible. We had to be alive for this to happen. So the phrase "in the flesh" doesn't mean being alive in this body. It must be referring to a state of being best referred to as "in the flesh". It must mean when "in the flesh" is all there was to us. We were nothing more than a human animal.

I think it is best understood by looking at John Chapter 3. 5Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' 8The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

I believe here in Romans 7:5 Paul is saying that when we were born of the flesh and not of the Spirit, that is what he means here to be "in the flesh." He doesn't mean while we were living with flesh on our bones. He means while living in flesh would best explain our spiritual status. We were not born again. We were just born in the flesh, the sarx. We were in the state of fleshly living.

What was our relationship to the law in that state? **the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death.**

The law was at work. It was at work arousing passions.

Passions- of an inward state, an affliction, passion

The literal rendering of this phrase is "the passions of our sins that are through the law." When we are in our adamic state, when we are in Adam under the law, the law is causing our sinful passions to bloom. And those passions were at work.

The word for work is energeo. It means

1) to be operative, be at work, put forth power

- 1a) to work for one, aid one
- 2) to effect
- 3) to display one's activity, show one's self operative

Here we see a life in which sin **does** have power. Sin is at work.

Sin has an effect. In Adam we were not set free from sin. Sin had energy over us, power over us. It was at work in us.

And what was its end result? What was the effect of the law on our passions? They were bearing fruit to death. Our lives are always bearing fruit. And our state determines which fruit we are bearing. In our un-reborn state we bore fruit to death. We had our roots dug into hell and the fruit we were producing were deadly fruits. They were fruits that destined us for judgment. They condemned us before the law.

⁶But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not *in* the oldness of the letter.

But now! This is a contrast word. In Christ we all are living a But Now existence. There are only 2 states we can be in. We can be in the flesh-only existence. Or we can be in the state of "But Now". A believer is in the "but now" existence. A believer has been delivered from the law. We have been loosed from the bondage of the law. We are freed from its condemnation. Why? Because there was a death. And whose death? It was our death in Christ's death. In that death we died to what we were held by. What were we held by? The law. A believer cannot claim to still be in that state. We cannot claim to still be held by the law.

so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not *in* the oldness of the letter.

There is always a "so that" element regarding new life. We are saved from something and for something. I am not sure how any serious student of scripture can conclude that a fruitless disobedient life can be maintained by a believer in Christ. It is contrary to a believer's reason for existence. Over and over in

scripture we see that believers are brought to Christ for a purpose. It is stated a lot of different ways but it is always to glorify the Christ who has saved them. Here it says "so that we should serve". Actually the Greek says so that we serve. Translators add either **should** or **may** at this point. I am not sure why.

Is it conceivable that we would be delivered by God in a miraculous act "so that we may or could or should serve" and then we **never fulfill** that purpose for which we were delivered? Would our God be inept in his selection or his empowerment? I can't see how it is possible with all that scripture has to say about the topic.

If you are here this morning and you are a believer, you were delivered so that you serve Christ. That is why we breathe. And how are we to serve?

in the newness of the Spirit and not *in* the oldness of the letter.

The word for newness is only used 2 times in the New Testament and both times in Romans. In 6:4 it says we should walk in newness of life. Here we serve in the newness of the Spirit.

The word for newness means

- 1a) in the new state of life in which the Holy Spirit places us so as to produce a new state which is eternal life

We are to serve in the new state of regeneration, the state of being in Christ, the state of being under grace instead of sin or the law. We serve based on the position in which we were placed. That is why it is so important that we understand our position before we are told to do anything. Everything that we are told to do is based on everything that has already been done to us. We are to serve based on the facts of what God has accomplished for us and in us before we ever did anything.

And how are we **not** to serve? We are not to serve in the **oldness of the letter.**

What does the oldness of the letter mean?

First, it is in direct contrast to the newness of the Spirit. And the newness of the Spirit is the state of life in which the Holy Spirit places us. Therefore the letter must refer to the state we were in prior to being placed in Christ. That is exactly what the word oldness refers to.

The Greek word for oldness is only used once in the New Testament in this verse. And it means the old state of life controlled by 'the letter'.

In Chapter 6 Paul refers to slaves obeying their masters. Here the word "serve" is from the same greek word as the word duolos for slave. It means to be a slave, serve, do service

So we are to exercise our slavery to God in our new found state of freedom from sin's power. We are to serve him in the new state of being He has placed us in.

We are not to serve him from our old state of being in Adam, the state we were born in.

Where "letter" is referred to here it probably means the sacred writings (of the OT). Now some take this to mean that the words on the pages of the Bible are the problem. The people contrast obeying the words on the page with obeying the Spirit of God. They say that being picky about what scripture actually says is a problem. They say we don't need to worry about that. We have the Spirit and we can simply follow our perceptions of what the Spirit is telling us. And by interpreting this verse that way the Word of God is subtly stripped of authority and man's perceptions are granted too much authority. But this verse cannot be interpreted this way. The verse is not referring to a problem with God's Word but a problem with our state of being. The problem is not with the Word that God has spoken but with the sinners he has spoken it to. If we are serving in the state of "the oldness of the letter", we have a big problem.

Paul refers to the phrase "the letter" when referring to this state several other places but he goes into greatest depth in II Cor 3. This is also a parallel passage showing some of the same flow of

thought as we have been studying in Romans. Let's end with this.

2 Corinthians 3

1Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you? 2You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; 3clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.

4And we have such trust through Christ toward God. 5Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, 6who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; **for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.**

(This verse is often used like the verse in Romans to say that careful interpretation of the words in scripture is not important. In fact they would say that is the letter that kills, but you can be free of that by following the perceptions of the Holy Spirit. But in context you can see here Christ has made us ministers of the new covenant as opposed to ministry of the law. The new covenant gives life. The law, on the other hand, only condemned. It is a similar line of thought that we see in Romans. He isn't talking about the law being useless. But he is talking about what it can and can't do. He is talking about the effects of each of the ministries.)

7But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, 8how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? 9For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. 10For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. 11For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious.

(Here we see his continued line of thought. We see the ministry of death through the law and the ministry of righteousness through Christ.)

12Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech—13unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away. 14But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. 15But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. 16Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. 17Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

(Here we see the same thing as Paul says in Romans. When we live in the Spirit, when we serve according to the new state we have been placed in- in the Spirit, then we have liberty. We have freedom from the reign of sin and freedom to act righteously. This is directly opposed to the ministry of the letter, of the law. It is not that Bible study is unimportant. It is not that proper and true doctrine is a waste of time. That isn't at all the point he is making. He is simply making the point that the ministry of the law cannot save us. It can only damn us.)

18But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

(And here we see the result of the ministry of Christ. We are currently, in this life, being transformed into the same image of Christ by the Spirit. Note that it does not say here **we have been** transformed, although in many ways we have. It does not say **we will be transformed**, although we know that to be true as well. But it says we **are BEING** transformed. That is the description of what the Holy Spirit is doing to every believer. And that is exactly the reason that a believer cannot live in sin. It is contrary to the state that Christ has placed us in. It is counter to the ministry He is performing in the life of every believer.)

