

# Free At Last

By Jeff Noblit

sermonaudio.com

**Bible Text:** Romans 7:1-6  
**Preached on:** Sunday, October 1, 2023

## **Anchored in Truth Ministries**

1915 Avalon Ave.  
Muscle Shoals, AL 35661

**Website:** [www.anchoredintruth.org](http://www.anchoredintruth.org)  
**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/anchoredintruth](http://www.sermonaudio.com/anchoredintruth)

Grab your Bibles and let's go to Romans chapter 7 this morning. Romans chapter 7. The Apostle Paul in writing to the church at Rome gets to Romans chapter 7 and he's going to use an analogy of the marriage relationship to illustrate the truth of our salvation in Jesus Christ. Let's look at that together. Romans chapter 7, beginning in verse 1 and we'll go down through verse 6. Romans chapter 7, verse 1.

1 Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives? [Now here here's the analogy, the illustration.] 2 For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. 3 So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man. 4 Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. 5 For 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. 6 But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.

Some years ago, I attended a conference, long way from here actually, and the theme of the conference was to investigate the rich theology of early African American slaves in our land. The rich theology of early African American slaves. And it was quite amazing in their situation with such little education, experiencing the brutality and the cruelty of slavery, yet so many of them found Christ and formed churches and worshiped with a robust biblical doctrine of salvation. And they wrote their own songs called Spirituals, and one of the most famous of those songs was simply entitled, "Free at Last. Free at Last. Thank God Almighty, I'm free at last. Free at Last. Free at last. Thank God Almighty, I'm free at last." Now, wait a minute, they were singing that song saying we're free at last, but they were still slaves. Well, here was their point, "You may enslave me, but I'm still free in Jesus." They found freedom from sin, from guilt, and from condemnation through the gospel of Jesus Christ and though their external situation

was dismal and horrible, their hearts were free. Now later on, Martin Luther King used that old Spiritual to speak to the, uh, civil rights movement, which was a good thing, but the original intent of the song was about freedom in Christ from sin and guilt and condemnation.

Well, Paul here is talking about the law, and, you know, anthropologists tell us that when they dig up the remains of ancient people, some of which they didn't know existed until they found their ancient remains, they will tell us, or they do tell us, that all ancient peoples had a law system. They had a had a a a a law system of the things they held to be right or things they held to be wrong, and it's amazing how similar these ancient civilizations', uh, law system was with the 10 Commandments or the law system of the Bible. That's because the 10 Commandments, the moral law of God, that law system is the foundation of all others and the Bible tells us that God has written his law in men's hearts. So by themselves, men, because of the conscience and the law of God he's put in them, will come up with a law system quite similar to the 10 Commandments. But regardless of what ancient people you're studying or where you might look to find a system of law manage to function by, there is one true law that all men must must answer to, and that is the law of God. God's law and we might say it's summarized in the moral law contained in the 10 Commandments, but it is God's law.

Thinking back to the Old Testament dispensation, on the 10th day of the seventh month in Israel, that was considered the most holy day of the year. It only occurred one time a year and only one man participated in this observance, and that was the Jewish great high priest. It was the great Day of Atonement. Out in the outer outer court, the holy place, two goats would be brought to the chief priest, the great high priest. One goat, he would place his hands on its head and he would confess the sins of Israel and that goat was taken away, symbolizing the taking away of sin. The other goat would be slain and he would take the blood of that goat, then he would take a pan of coals taken from the altar, then he would take some incense, and with the blood and the coals and the incense, he would go back in through the holy place, back behind the veil, into the Holy of Holies, where he only went one time a year. Tradition says they put a rope around him unless God kill him back in that place. In the Holy of Holies, the cherubim are on the wall, the Ark of the Covenant is before him on the floor, and the top of the Ark was the mercy seat. As he walked in behind the veil into the Holy of Holies, he would put the incense on the coals and a Shekinah cloud would come up to guard him from the presence of the all-consuming God. And then he would sprinkle the blood of that goat on the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies, symbolizing the holding back of God's wrath for one more year, because they were transgressors of God's law.

Looking at Paul's analogy here, I want to break this down into two main points, because oh, how glorious the truth is that we see in these verses. I. Let's notice wedded to the law. That's the analogy Paul gives, that all of us, by nature, are wedded to the law. We have this husband the law. Now, in biblical marriage, I should say in the ancient marriage of the Jews, even in the Greeks and the Romans of this day, marriage was quite different than today. In the ancient marriage, the man had all the authority. The woman had very little rights. Actually, Jewish women had more rights than the other women of antiquity,

but they had, uh, not been teaching that as they should have and so there was this austere, cold, authoritative rule of the husband over the wife. She was fully subjected to his authority, and far too often she was not much more than a piece of property and so she was wedded to this man and bound under his authority. Now, as I've been preaching from Titus, you know, we've talked about how the duties and the roles are not changed, but marriage has been radically perfected in Christ so that now it's love from the husband to the wife and love from the wife to the husband that radically transforms the duties and the responsibilities and the subjugation of marriage. But not in this day. They hadn't been walking in that. So when Paul uses the analogy of being wedded to the law, he knows what a cold, austere, and harsh picture that would give the people and that's the picture you and I need to have this morning.

So the Bible says, here this woman is, she is under this authority of of this husband, as we are under authority of God's holy law. You can summarize the law again in the moral law, the 10 Commandments. "You shall have no gods before Me. You shall not make for yourselves an idol. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. Remember the Sabbath day, keep it holy. Honor your parents. You should not commit murder. You should not commit adultery. You should not steal. You shall not lie and you shall not covet." Of course, there are varying laws that extend out from those, but that would be the the core, if you will, of the law that we are under. So here Paul takes the analogy of marriage to illustrate the spiritual truth that we are all married to this law and answerable. We are subject to this law.

Now, three sub-points here under wedded to the law. Notice, first of all, the binding authority of the law. The binding authority of the law. In verse 1 here, using the analogy again of marriage, he says, uh, uh, the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives, verse 2, just as the married woman is bound to the husband while he is living. So as long as you're alive, you are bound, obligated to, answerable to the law of God, the binding authority of law. Again in the marriage uh parallel illustration, as long as he lives you are bound. In verse 3, he carries it further, "if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she's an adulteress." Why? Because she's bound to one man. So if you are alive, you, you sir and you ma'am, you are under the binding authority of law. You can't sneak out from under it. You can't join a religious system to avoid it. You can't do enough right or not do enough wrong. You are bound, answerable to God's law.

Well, secondly, not only the binding authority, the comprehensive authority of God's law. Again, the simple phrase there, while he is living in verse 2, she's bound by law to that man and that talks about the breadth, if you will, the comprehensiveness of that law over your life. And even more than that, in the balance of biblical truth, not only does it cover the totality of your life in a comprehensive nature, the law of God covers not only what you do externally, but it covers what you are internally. The law judges the thoughts and intentions of the heart. This is something our Lord Jesus brought out. You know, a lot of times people talk about, well, Jesus, you know, he's of love and he's of grace and he's of mercy. He certainly is. But Jesus fully honored the law of God. For example, in Matthew chapter 5, if you have verses 20 and 21, he's preaching and Jesus in this what's called the Sermon on the Mount said, "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not

commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court." Now think about that. He said, not just if you do commit murder, but if you have a murderous thought in your heart, hatred in your heart or anger in your heart, you're guilty of violating the law of God that says thou shalt not murder. Pretty weighty. That's quite comprehensive, is it not?

So perhaps you can get through a day and not violate externally one of the 10 Commandments, but you probably can't get through five minutes without violating internally the 10 commandments. And James tells us, if you break one of the commandments, you're guilty of all of them. That's quite comprehensive. And then we'll go to uh Matthew 5 again, 27 and 28, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery in his heart with her already." So here again, you may live your life and not be unfaithful to your marriage vows, but in your heart and your mind, have you been perfectly pure? If not, you're guilty of violating the law of God, the comprehensive authority of the law of God. You're bound to it, you cannot escape. If you're alive, you're bound to the law. Actually, we could take it further, could we not? When you die, you're gonna be accountable to the law. The comprehensive nature of the law. While you're living, the Bible says, you're answerable to the law and even including the thoughts and intentions of our hearts.

Number 3. The condemning authority of the law. The condemning authority of the law. In verse 3, giving this analogy again that illustrates our relationship to the law, "So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress," which means she stands condemned publicly for abandoning this thid uh devotion to her husband and joining with another man. So the condemnation element is there. Matter of fact, uh adultery in the old economy, the the old Jewish law was spelled out in Leviticus that the one who commits adultery is to be stoned to death. It was a statement of public punishment, public condemnation. So this is the condemning authority of the law.

John 3:18 reminds us, "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." Now, why are we judged already? Because we're already transgressors. We've already violated God's law. We're guilty of all of it. We're under the condemnation of law, the Bible says just as a woman who's bound to her husband under his authority, if she steps out of that and unites with another man, she's publicly condemned. Paul says, so are you, under God's law.

Now look at verse 5, "For while we were in the flesh," that is, while we only, now listen to me, think now with me, while we only had the capacity of our fallen, unredeemed humanity to function with, there wasn't anything newborn in us yet. We were not born again yet. While we were only functioning in our fallen, depraved, unredeemed humanity, here's what he says happened. When you walked that way, you couldn't uh you couldn't pull yourselves up by your bootstraps, you couldn't clean yourself up, you

couldn't cleanse yourself of the defilement of violating God's law, quite the opposite. Verse 5 again, "For 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." Again, it's a statement of condemnation. We are of this uh uh fleshly, fallen, corrupted, polluted, sinful body, and in that body, when the law came before us, we would see God's holy law, and by the way, there's nothing wrong with God's law. God's law is perfect because God is perfect. God's law is holy because God is holy. The law is the expression of God's very being, so it can't be wrong. And what he's saying is, left to yourselves in your own natural abilities and your own natural virtue, which you really have none, but for figure of speech, I'll say that, and your own natural capacity to do right and good, when God shows you his law, the sinful passions in your fallen flesh made you want to violate the law all the more. There's something in us naturally that when somebody says, "Don't," we say, "I bet you I can." Somebody says, "You got to do this." "Well, I'm not sure I have to do it." You're just a rebel from conception and so am I, and that speaks to how condemned we stand that even when God gave us the pure, holy, and righteous law, it stirred us up to sin even more. There's just something about us that wants to do what's dirty. That's what Paul's pointing out.

When I, I don't know where I found this but it was I'm sure one of the Puritan scholars, as he's talking about this sin principle in our old fallen unredeemed humanity and how unable we are to make that sinful passion or rather that old unredeemed humanity do what's right, and actually, when we see the law, it wants to do more wrong, he said it this way, "The law by commanding, forbidding and threatening corrupt and fallen man, but offering no grace to cure and strengthen, did but stir up the corruption and like the sun shining upon a dung hill, excite and draw up the filthy steams. We being lame by the fall, the law comes and directs us but provides nothing to heal and help our lameness and so makes us halt and stumble all the more." Paul is saying, how condemned you stand that when God sent the help of his holy law, it made you more rotten, more guilty and standing condemned.

We're carried down the stream of sin as natural beings and the law is but an imperfect dam which makes the stream swell higher and rage more and more. The more we see the law, the more the Bible says we bear fruit for death. Look at verse 5 again, "For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law," or or which were aroused by the law, "were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death." Paul is saying the more you learned about God's holy, righteous, and good law, the more you produce fruit of death, which means that that fruit which deserves condemnation. Is it not an utterly most absurd idea that men can somehow keep rules and please God? When God says the more rules I give you, the more worthy of condemnation you become.

You are wedded to the law. We're born into this world wedded to the law. We're born to this husband, the law, and it has binding authority, it has comprehensive authority, and it has condemning authority over us. What a state we're in but I'm glad Paul didn't end there. II. Wedded to Christ. Wedded to Christ. You see, my marriage to the law wasn't working out. Uh it wasn't helping me at least to have the law as my husband, figuratively speaking. But yet I'm still bound to the law. I'm still under the comprehensive authority of

the law and I'm still condemned by the law but I need a new husband. And when you come to Christ, when Christ has saved you, two things in particular from the text. Number one, A, you're legally discharged from the law. Legally. In justice. You are discharged from the law. Look at verses 2 and 3. "For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband." So there's a way out of that previous marriage if someone dies. Verse 3, "So then, if while her husband is living," there it is again, "she is joined to another man, she's called an adulteress; but if her husband dies," that's the way out, "she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man."

So we need to be free from the binding, comprehensive and condemning authority of the law and to do that, someone has to die. Now who's gonna die in this marriage? Can the law die? Can God's law just die and disappear? No, no, no, never, no. God can't disappear and his law can't disappear but God has provided in Christ that though the law cannot die, you can die. You can die to the law. Look at verse 4, the first part, "Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined," wedded, "to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for Christ or for God." So, we died on the cross when Christ died. Galatians 2:20 reminds us, "I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless, I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loves me and gave himself for me."

Now, verse 2 tells us, well, let me give you Galatians 4:4 right quick. Galatians 4:4 reminds us, "But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law." Now that's very important. We were under law, but Christ stepped into this earth and came under the authority of the law so that he might free us from the authority of the law.

Two words, one in verse 2, one in verse 3, that are very powerful. Uh the first one is mentioned twice in our text. Let's read verse 2 again. "For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband." And the parallel is that we now are released, legally discharged from all obligations to the law in order to gain a right standing before God. Did you hear that? We are now legally discharged. Released, the text says. Now the word release there means terminating all association. Someone, a legalist may come up to you in town or maybe in the the school or maybe in the workplace, whatever it may be, and they say, "Don't you think you have to do this? Don't you think you have to do that? Don't you think you have to keep this law or that work?" You say, "Look, look, I've been released from all association to the law in order to gain a right standing before God." Because I'm dead. I'm crucified with Christ. And the Bible clearly says, once you're dead, you're not answerable to the law anymore. Just as when a woman, if the husband dies, she's not answerable. Death terminates the association and the authority it has over you.

And then verse 3, the word free, "So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man." The word

free there is the idea of unrestrained or exempt from. You are not bound by any obligation whatsoever. "You've got to do this. You've got to keep God's law. You've got to obey this or obey that or not do this or not do that." No, no, no. You are free from all obligation to any rule keeping to gain a right standing before God because in Christ you've died and therefore no longer have an obligation to that previous marriage. That's what Paul is saying.

You see, when Jesus was born he was born under the law, but even I think you can go back into that when God the Father put Jesus God the Son into the womb of Mary, when he was a one-celled human in the womb of Mary, Jesus was bound by law. He was under law. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea and laid in a feed trough, that little baby was under law, bound by law. Jesus grew up and he lived on the earth for 33 years and while he lived, he was under the law and perfectly fulfilled all of God's law. And then when Jesus went to the cross, he was under the dictates of the law and there on the cross, he received just retribution against the children who were lawbreakers, and he received that just condemnation and retribution on behalf of the children, thus extinguishing, if you will, effectually removing all the law's punishment against the children.

So I'm in Christ and so his bearing of all the law on my behalf frees me from any responsibility to the law. All of its binding authority, gone. All of its comprehensive authority, gone. Its condemning authority, gone. Romans 8:1 and 2 reminds us, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." There is therefore now, not later, not at the judgment seat of Christ, not at the Great White Throne Judgment, now, child of God, there is no condemnation for you if you are in Christ Jesus. "For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death." So now things get wonderfully interesting. What you could not do unredeemed trying to keep the law, you can now do redeemed in Christ, that is, begin to bear fruit that pleases God. All your fruit before you're converted, no matter how hard you worked to keep rules, do right and not do wrong, avoid this or avoid that, all of that rule-keeping only could produce fruit of death but now you can produce fruit that honors God, but only after you're saved.

So B in our outline, not only are we legally discharged from the law in Christ, we're now lovingly devoted to Christ. Now, there's this, again, notice my terminology here, there's not this cold, austere, harsh thing of, "I'm a Christian now, and I've got to do this, and I've got to do that, and I've got to bring my tithes or Jeff will yell at me, and then I've got to be in small groups or he'll yell at me again, and I've got to do it." No, no, you do have duties, but listen, listen, listen, the heart affections have changed and it may not be as strong as it ought to be, but there's at least the germ, the seed of a desire to do these duties now out of loving devotion to my new husband, Jesus Christ.

So love, in a sense, fulfills the law. This loving devotion, notice what he says in verse 4, "Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be," here's the word I want to look at, "joined to another." Now, that's not the Greek word kola. It could be translated join, but it has the idea of joining a

person at a restaurant for a dinner, joining a friend in his chariot and taking a ride. That's not the word here. The word for join here is the word ginomai, and ginomai literally means to bring into existence. It means the new birth. God did something. He did something in your heart through the merits of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit of God came in and now you are birthed and brought into a relationship with God's Son Jesus Christ. Things have changed. You didn't just start a new religion. You didn't decide just to get baptized. God's Spirit birthed something in you. He joined you to a new one, a new husband, Jesus Christ.

Oh, the sovereignty of God. When Jesus was conceived in the heart and mind of the Godhead, Jesus said, "I I'm doing this that I might have My children one day." When he was born, he came into this world physically that he might redeem his children one day. When he lived and fulfilled the law he said, "I'm doing this so that I might righteously qualify to redeem My children." When he goes to the cross, "I'm doing this for My children." And then after all that is done, the Bible uses, the Bible says God uses the preaching of the gospel and the ministry of the Holy Spirit to join us to Jesus Christ. And you're not allowed, you are not allowed to be a part of a local church until you're one that God has joined to Jesus Christ. That's the problem in so many of our churches. They have people that join that congregation that God's never joined them to Jesus, and then you try to have a biblical church and they go crazy on you. They don't get it because these things are spiritually discerned and they're not of the spirit. Powerful truth, they're joined.

Well, then another phrase done in verse 6, the first part, "But now we have been released," we talked about that word before, second time it's used here, then when we talked about discharged from our obligation to the law, "released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter." The Holy Spirit has changed our heart. We no longer have any obligation to God's law to obtain or maintain a right standing with a Holy God, and now because of this changed heart, this spiritual new birth, we now are no longer bound to the old but are released for the new. The word bound there, uh when it talks about how we were bound to the law, it has the idea of being held back. Here's the point, you could not do anything productive for God's glory, for God's kingdom, for God's name in the earth because you were held back by your sinfulness and by the law, and once you're saved, the Spirit of God's regenerated your heart. Now you're no longer held back. Now you can join a local church, you can study your Bible, you can minister to your brothers and sisters in Christ, you can be a witness for God in the world and begin to bear fruit that pleases God, that will last all the way into eternity. At one time you were held back in your unregenerate, sinfully corrupt nature, condemned by the law, bound by the law, the comprehensive authority of the law all over your head, but now that's been removed. You're no longer held back from knowing God and the one I hope that I hope that I hope is happening in your hearts, you're no longer held back from loving and treasuring God.

I don't want you to do Jeff Noblit's system. I believe God's given us a thorough biblical system and structure for the local church. We had one of the leading evangelists in Southern Baptist life one time say, this is the best structure, best organized church in the Southern Baptist Convention. And my point is, why shouldn't it be? Why shouldn't we do



our best for the church? But that's not the point. Dotting all the I's and crossing all the T's and administrating well is important, but it doesn't matter if the heart's not changed. You must do what we do in small groups because you're loving and treasuring Christ. You must do what we do in missions and church planting because you're loving and treasuring Christ. You must do what you do in the everyday workaday world, being a good witness for Jesus because you love and treasure Christ. Do you want me to tell you something? Are you listening? I think I'm on year 43 around here. If you're doing it with any other motivation, you're not going to make it. You're gonna burn out on me. You're gonna fall out on me. And then when you burn out on me and fall out on me, here's what a lot of times you'll say, "Well, it's that Jeff Noblit's theology I don't go along with. It's their... I tell you what, I don't like their doctrine." No, no, all you're doing is flying a flag of your self-proposed virtue and wisdom when really you fell out because you don't have the Spirit maintaining you.

Can I tell you something? Can I just be honest? I didn't really want to preach this Sunday, but I got up here and I'm loving it because the Spirit helps us. Amen. The Spirit helps us. We're no longer held back from knowing God. We're no longer held back from really loving and treasuring God. And of course, his work through his Son, Jesus Christ, and certainly then we are no longer being held back from bearing true, lasting, eternal fruit from God. Now married to Jesus Christ, not the law, we produce fruit that honors him. We are free, free, free from the binding authority of the law, the comprehensive authority of the law and the condemning authority of the law.

In my mind's eye, I see that old high priest, maybe he's done it 30 times. The great Day of Atonement, he's passed back through the veil of the Holy of Holies. He comes out into the outer court, the holy place. He's got some drying goat blood on his hand and stuck to that drying goat blood is some incense. He's got the bowl of burning coals over here. And in that Old Testament era, I think often that old high priest looked at that and thought, "This isn't enough. This isn't enough." But if he looks over the wall of Jerusalem, the outcast place, there's a little hill called Golgotha, a little hill called Calvary or the place of the skull, and if he could look forward from his Old Testament era with the eyes of faith, he would see that little hill is the real Holy of Holies. That little hill is the real mercy seat. And if he could look at that hill with the eyes of faith, he would see the Son of God, nails in his hands and nails through his feet, and royal, red, redeeming blood falling down that cross, hitting the ground. Every drop hitting the ground. And every time it hits the ground, a little tuff of dust from that dry, arid, Palestinian soil comes up, and every one of them shouting to the outer reaches of eternity, "Free at last. Free at last. Free at last. Thank God Almighty, we're free at last."