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**Free Through Death**

**Romans 7.1-6**

**Series: The Pure Gospel**

**Rev. Andrew Hawkins, Ph.D.**

**The Village Church**

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I. Introduction

- A. There are occasions which cause one to raise one's sense of excitement and anticipation
  - 1. When an unexpected and fortuitous set of circumstances presents itself
    - a. And you can't wait to take advantage of it
- B. I remember one such occasion when I was playing high school basketball
  - 1. It was a pre-season practice game against another very good team
  - 2. And it happened when I stole a pass at half court and there was no one between me and the basket
    - a. And my eyes lit up
    - b. And I immediately started for the basket
    - c. And I dribbled once, then twice
  - 3. But then, I stopped
    - a. That's right – stopped dead on the spot
    - b. And everybody else caught up
    - c. And I missed my chance
  - 4. I blame it all on the coach
    - a. You see, it was a practice game
    - b. And sometimes in practice games coaches make up some limitations to teach his players some principles
    - c. And my problem was that I dribbled too much
    - d. So he told me at the beginning of the game that if I took more than two dribbles before passing the ball, he would take me out of the game
    - e. And since I always do what the coach tells me – I stopped after two dribbles
  - 5. Then, as soon as play was stopped, the coach subbed me out!
    - a. I came over to the bench with a puzzled look on my face
    - b. "Why'd you take me out?"
    - c. "You fool! Why'd you stop?"
    - d. "You told me I wasn't to dribble more than twice!"
    - e. He just rolled his eyes!
  - 6. So my highly anticipated moment of glory was wasted!
- C. You can understand the moment, can't you?
  - 1. It happens in athletics all the time

- a. When the hitter is looking for a fastball right down the middle, and here it comes! You can't wait to jump on it and hit it out of the park!
  - b. Or in tennis when you've charged the net and the opponents lob is weak, and you're in a position to just smash it into his court and win the point
  - c. Or in football, and the wide receiver sees his defender trip and fall to the ground, you're wide open, the ball is in the air coming toward you, and all you have to do is catch it and it's a touchdown!
- D. Well, preachers can have those moments too
- 1. Even during sermon preparation
    - a. I had two of those moments this past week
  - 2. One of the things the preacher gets excited about is illustrations
    - a. Illustrations are hard to come up with
    - b. I spend a lot of time trying to come up with illustrations
    - c. Illustrations are important – they may be the only thing you people remember about the sermon!
    - d. Sometimes I know right away what illustration to use; other times I can sit in front of the keyboard for an hour trying to come up with something
  - 3. But when I began working on the text for this morning I had one of those moments
    - a. That's because Paul opens our text with an illustration!
    - b. There it was! I didn't have to think of it at all!
    - c. All I had to do what read it and unpack it's significance
    - d. You can't imagine how excited I was!
- E. Here's the illustration
- 1. **Romans 7:1–3** (ESV) —
    - a. 1 Or do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives?
    - b. 2 For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage.
    - c. 3 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 if she marries another man she is not an adulteress.
  - 2. Now Romans isn't about marriage
    - a. But Paul uses marriage as an illustration for something else
- F. The other thing that can get my juices flowing is a good preposition
- 1. I've mentioned before that I can preach on a preposition
    - a. I love prepositions!
    - b. That's because prepositions are connection words

- c. And they show relationships between usually nouns and other parts of speech
  - 2. And the whole point of a sermon is to show relationships between key concepts or actions
- G. So I got juiced when I read the rest of the text and saw the next sentence
  - 1. And I saw, not just one preposition
    - a. Or two prepositions
  - 2. I saw eight prepositions!
    - a. In just one sentence!
    - b. I was psyched!
    - c. I couldn't wait to unpack the sentence
- H. Here's the sentence
  - 1. **Romans 7:4** (ESV) —
    - a. 4 Likewise, my brothers, you also have died
    - b. to the law
    - c. through the body of Christ,
    - d. so that you may belong
    - e. to another,
    - f. to him who has been raised
    - g. from the dead,
    - h. in order that we may bear fruit
    - i. for God.
- I. And of course, it's even better that that sentence is meant to explain the meaning of the illustration
- J. The rest of our text has it's share of prepositions also
  - 1. **Romans 7:5–6** (ESV) —
    - a. 5 For 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.
    - b. 6 But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

## II. **The Gospel of God**

- A. Now before we get into this text, let's remember where we are in Romans
- B. Romans is about the Gospel
  - 1. The good news that God, in Jesus Christ, was reconciling the world to Himself
    - a. Not counting the sins of people against them
    - b. But through the righteousness of Christ
    - c. And through His death on the cross paying the penalty for our sin
    - d. He made it possible for us to have eternal life
  - 2. Eternal life – not just a really long life, which it is, of course
    - a. But an “eternal kind of life”, a life of love in the presence of the God who is love

3. Paul calls it the Gospel of God right at the beginning
  4. And he establishes that the gospel is for every human being – Jew and Gentile alike
  5. **Romans 1:16–17** (ESV) —
    - a. 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.
    - b. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”
- C. Paul does that by establishing from the beginning that human beings are in desperate need of salvation
1. In Chapter 1 he indicates that God is angry – he uses the word “wrath”
  2. And that God’s wrath is revealed against ungodliness and unrighteousness
    - a. By those who suppress the truth about God
  3. And he proclaims that every single human being is without excuse, having received the revelation about God eternal power and divine nature through the creation
- D. In Chapter 2 Paul shows how both Jew and Gentile alike are culpable for their rebellion
1. That whether, like the Jew, they have the written revelation of God
  2. Or like the Gentile, they have the revelation of God written on their hearts
  3. They are all guilty as charged
- E. In Chapter 3 Paul argues that the sinfulness of humanity is both universal and pervasive
1. Universal – that it infects every human being
  2. **Romans 3:10–12** (ESV) —
    - a. 10 as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; 11 no one understands; no one seeks for God.
    - b. 12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”
  3. And pervasive – that it infects every human faculty of every human being
    - a. Our minds
    - b. Our wills
    - c. Our emotions
    - d. Our actions
    - e. Our motivations
- F. And also in Chapter 3 Paul indicates that any amount of effort to keep the law of God cannot make up for our sinful condition
1. **Romans 3:20** (ESV) —
    - a. 20 For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight...
- G. But the good news is that God provides the righteousness we need and could never produce by ourselves
1. **Romans 3:21–22** (ESV) —

- a. 21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—
    - b. 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe....
  - H. And he says that this righteousness is made available to all who believe in Jesus Christ
    - 1. **Romans 3:22–24** (ESV) —
      - a. 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction:
      - b. 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
      - c. 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...
  - I. That's the **Gospel of God**
    - 1. Called the **Gospel of Christ** elsewhere
      - a. And even “my gospel” by Paul
  - J. Paul goes on to illustrate in Chapter 4 that the gospel of God was active in the Old Testament as well
    - 1. That Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness
    - 2. And that David received the forgiveness of sins through believing the word of God about Messiah
  - K. And then in Chapter 5 Paul begins to details the glorious benefits of this Gospel of God
    - 1. We have **peace with God** – reconciled with the One against whom we had rebelled
    - 2. We have **access to God** Himself through Christ
    - 3. We rejoice in the **hope of the glory of God**
    - 4. We're able even to **rejoice in our sufferings** because of this gospel
    - 5. And God's **love has been poured into our hearts** through the Holy Spirit
  - L. This is all, of course, incredibly amazing – that's why we sing Amazing Grace!
    - 1. Because, as Paul describes it, **Christ died for the ungodly!**
    - 2. That God shows His love for us in that **while we were still sinners, Christ died for us**
    - 3. He then shows how we are **saved from the wrath of God** – which is where, you'll recall, Paul started with his exposition of the Gospel of God
    - 4. And that we're **reconciled to God** by the death of His Son, and saved by His life
  - M. And all of this has happened because Jesus is the second Adam as it were
    - 1. That Adam was the progenitor of the human race in our sin
    - 2. But Christ became the source of our justification and sanctification
  - N. That's the gospel of God in a nutshell
- III. **Objection!**
  - A. Now at this point, if you were in a court of law, you were hear the opposing counsel stand up and say “Objection!”

1. And as a matter of fact, the opposing counsel would object twice
  - a. He would say, "Objection! Objection!"
- B. We saw what those objections were in our previous studies
  1. And Paul anticipates those objections
- C. We saw that the objections fall into two extremes
  1. We used the Greek mythological sea monsters imagined by Homer to describe these objections – Scylla and Charybdis
  2. Scylla and Charybis were on the opposite sides of the Strait of Messina between Sicily and Calabria on the Italian mainland
  3. Scylla was a rock shoal personified as a six-head sea monster
  4. Charybdis was a whirlpool off the coast of Italy
  5. They were maritime dangers so close together that they inevitably threatened any vessel seeking to pass between them
- D. We described them as the Scylla of Antinomianism and Charybdis of Legalism
  1. (Or was is the Scylla of Legalism and Charybdis of Antinomianism)
  2. No matter – you get the idea
- E. Antinomianism on the one hand was the danger of saying, since we are justified by faith alone in Christ alone, we can then continue to sin with impunity
  1. Legalism was the opposite reaction, in which keeping the Law was seen as necessary in addition to trusting in the work of Christ
- F. Paul anticipates those objections in Chapters 6 and 7
  1. Usually by raising the objection itself
- G. Romans 6:1 (ESV) —
  1. 1 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?
- H. Romans 6:15 (ESV) —
  1. 15 What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!
- I. Romans 7:7 (ESV) —
  1. 7 What then shall we say? That the law is sin?
- J. So Paul takes time – essentially as a parenthesis within his account of the Gospel of God – to answer these objections

#### IV. Overruled!

- A. So Paul stands up in the courtroom to address the judge and reject opposing counsel's objection
  1. So that the Judge will say, "Overruled!"
- B. Here's how he does it
  1. He argues that something has changed in those who believe in Jesus Christ
  2. Romans 6:2 (ESV) — 2 By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?
    - a. We've died to sin in turning to Christ
    - b. We're changed people
- C. He then speaks of our union with Christ

1. In trusting alone in Jesus as our Savior, we're joined to Christ – united with Him
2. **Romans 6:5–7** (ESV) —
  - a. 5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.
  - b. 6 We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.
  - c. 7 For one who has died has been set free from sin.
- D. And then, while we've been set free from sin, we still have the capacity to sin
  1. But we not longer are held in bondage to sin
    - a. We don't have to sin
    - b. We're not longer enslaved to sin
  2. Instead we've become voluntary slaves of God
- E. And he concludes Chapter 6:
  1. **Romans 6:22–23** (ESV) —
    - a. 22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God,
    - b. the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.
    - c. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- F. That still leaves the question of Legalism
  1. If we're saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and not by observing the Law, what's the purpose of the Law of God?
  2. Well that's where we are now – in Chapter 7
    - a. Chapter 7 is part of that long parenthesis
    - b. The parenthesis where Paul deals with objections of opposing counsel
  3. And in this case, he brings it to us with this kind of argument
    - a. If we're not saved by keeping the Law, what's the Law for?
  4. His argument is that in Christ Jesus we've been freed from the Law

V. **Freed from the Law**

- A. So here's the text – first the illustration
- B. **The Illustration**
  1. **Romans 7:1–3** (ESV) —
    - a. 1 Or do you not know, brothers—
    - b. for I am speaking to those who know the law—
    - c. that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives?
    - d. 2 For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives,
    - e. but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage.
    - f. 3 Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive.
    - g. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law,

- h. and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress.
- C. **We're freed from the Law – by death!**
  - 1. And you intuitively understand how that works
    - a. And by the way – this applies to Paul's Jewish audience, but also his Gentile audience
    - b. "... I am speaking to those who know the law"
    - c. In this context, that's both Jew and Gentile
  - 2. And even today, that's the way we understand the marriage law
    - a. We don't practice polygamy (at least not yet, although our culture is sexually disintegrating before our eyes)
    - b. It's illegal to marry someone when you're married to someone else!
    - c. You either have to get a divorce – and you know Jesus isn't too keen on divorce
    - d. Or one of the spouses has to die
  - 3. And when the spouse dies, the other spouse is then free to remarry
- D. So in this illustration it's expressed in terms of the wife
  - 1. The wife is bound by law to her husband while he is alive
    - a. But when the husband dies, she is free to remarry
  - 2. But if she lives with another man while her husband is still alive, she is guilty of adultery
- E. Paul's point is that what frees the woman from the marriage law is death
  - 1. The death of her husband
    - a. She is freed by death
- F. Now, one thing we should mention
  - 1. This is an illustration
    - a. It's not an allegory
    - b. An allegory – where the characters in the allegory represent specific parties in the real setting
    - c. So you can't take it too far
  - 2. It's an illustration that makes a point
    - a. And the point is – that in the case of the marriage law, we're freed by death
- G. The argument then continues by applying that basic point to our own relationship with the Law of God
  - 1. And here's where we encounter those delightful prepositions!

## VI. **The Death that Frees**

- A. Text
  - 1. **Romans 7:4** (ESV) —
    - a. 4 Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law
    - b. through the body of Christ,
    - c. so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead,
    - d. in order that we may bear fruit for God.



- B. **The Kind of Death**
1. We won't look at all eight prepositions, but we'll look at four main relationships
  2. The first preposition describes what kind of death frees us from the Law
    - a. It's not that we ourselves have physically died
    - b. No – we've died **"to the law"**
  3. It's not that the Law of God will have no relevance to us anymore
    - a. As we'll see as Chapter 7 unfolds, that's not the case
  4. But in our union with Christ, **we've died to the** consequences of the Law, the **penalty of the Law**
    - a. Because Jesus has already paid the penalty
  5. **We've died to the guilt** of our transgressions of the Law
    - a. Because Jesus took upon Himself our guilt
  6. And because we've died with Christ – as illustrated by our baptism in Christ – we've died to the Law of God
    - a. Because we are united in His death
- C. **The Means of Death**
1. Which brings us to the means of this death to the Law
  2. We've died to the law **"through the body of Christ"**
  3. Our death to the Law occurred when Christ died in our place
    - a. When He took upon Himself the just punishment for our sin – in His own body on the cross
  4. Every time we remember the Lord's death – which is every time we observe the Lord's Supper, take communion
    - a. We remember His death in our place
    - b. And we remember His death is the means by which we are freed from the unrelenting demands of the Law of God
    - c. And we remember He is the reason we will never have to stand in the courtroom of judgment and hear "Guilty on all counts!" read in our condemnation
  5. The body of Christ is the means of our death to the Law
- D. **The Purpose of Death**
1. But now look at the purpose of this death
    - a. **"So that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead"**
  2. Here's where the marriage illustration really hits the mark
    - a. In the marriage illustration, the death of the husband frees the woman from the law of marriage
    - b. So she can be free to belong to another man whom she will marry
  3. That's what happens in our death to the Law
    - a. We're free to belong to another
    - b. Not just any old "another"; not just any old husband
    - c. No! We are free to belong to "him who has been raised from the dead"
    - d. We're free to belong to a new husband – the Lord Jesus Christ

- e. We're now married to Christ!
- 4. Paul loves this very special picture of our relationship to Christ
  - a. **Ephesians 5:25–27** (ESV) — 25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.
- 5. The death of Christ freed us from the Law so that we might belong to Him – our beloved husband
  - a. Who sanctifies us
  - b. Who washes us
  - c. Who presents us to Himself without spot or wrinkle or any such thing
  - d. Who prepares His bride as holy and without blemish
- 6. What a purpose!
  - a. Who glory!
  - b. What expectation!
  - c. What anticipation!
- 7. And you can see these objections dissolving before our eyes
  - a. Holiness, true beauty
  - b. The embodiment of truth
  - c. Righteousness and peace kissing each other
- 8. Without the preposterous objection of antinomianism encouraging sin
  - a. Without the sword of Damocles, the Law of God, hanging over our heads
- 9. Because now we belong to Him who was raised from the dead to newness of life
- E. **The Result of Death**
  - 1. Which brings us to the result of death
  - 2. **“In order that we may bear fruit for God”**
    - a. In fact, the Greek verb is even stronger
    - b. It's an aorist subjunctive which indicates an action at a point in time which will produce a definite outcome
  - 3. So the way to read that is, “in order that we may bear fruit for God – and we surely will!”
  - 4. So in our union with Christ, we have
    - a. Died with Him
    - b. Died to the Law
    - c. Died to it's penalty and guilt
    - d. All through His death on our behalf
    - e. So that we might belong to Him as our newly betrothed beloved
    - f. And we will, in fact, bear the peaceful fruit of righteousness as a result
  - 5. We will be sanctified through our union with Jesus Christ

## VII. **The Great Contrast**

- A. And finally, our text concludes with a great contrast
  - 1. It's a contrast that looks at our lives before trusting in Christ
    - a. Compared to our lives after trusting in Christ
  - 2. It's a contrast that we'll come back to in our subsequent messages
    - a. But we'll set out the basic framework in the moments we have left
- B. **Understanding the Flesh**
  - 1. But first, we need to understand one particular term that will have growing significance as we continue through Romans
    - a. That word is "flesh"
    - b. **Greek = sarx**
  - 2. Like many English words, Greek words can have different meanings based on the context
    - a. And sarx is one of those words
  - 3. Flesh can mean the human body, particularly the soft tissues
    - a. Luke 24.39 speaks of "flesh and bones"
  - 4. Flesh can mean the whole person
    - a. Luke 3.6, quoting Isaiah, speaks of "all flesh shall see the salvation of God"
    - b. Meaning all kinds of people will see the salvation of God
  - 5. Flesh can mean human nature, body, soul and spirit
    - a. Jesus took on our human nature
    - b. John 1.14 – the Word became flesh
  - 6. But there is also a moral meaning for flesh
    - a. Flesh representing our sinful nature
    - b. And that meaning is introduced in this passage
    - c. And from this point on dominates the conversation in Romans
- C. **Before Death**
  - 1. Here's the text
  - 2. **Romans 7:5** (ESV) —
    - a. 5 For while we were living in the flesh,
    - b. our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death.
  - 3. Before our death in Christ to the Law, we were living in the flesh
    - a. That is, our sinful natures dominated us
    - b. We had no real choice but to follow our selfish impulses and dispositions
  - 4. And so before we died to the Law, our sinful passions were at work in our bodily members
    - a. And they bore the fruit of death
    - b. Sin is always destructive
    - c. And sin was tearing us apart
  - 5. But interestingly – while living in the flesh, dominated as we were by our sinful natures, **our sinful passions were aroused by the Law!**

- a. We'll come back to that in subsequent studies
    - b. But the Law, rather than sanctifying our natures, actually aroused our sinful passions
  - 6. And you, again, understand this implicitly
    - a. Tell us not to do something – and we want to do it!
- D. **After Death**
  - 1. But then the contrast
  - 2. **Romans 7:6** (ESV) —
    - a. 6 But now we are released from the law,
    - b. having died to that which held us captive,
    - c. so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.
  - 3. So freed by death
    - a. Freed from the Law – having died to the Law
    - b. We have also died to that which held us captive
    - c. That is – our flesh, our sinful natures
  - 4. So now we respond by the impulses of the Spirit of God who dwells within us
    - a. And not in impulsive rebellion against the will of God

## VIII. Conclusion

- A. So the illustration
  - 1. The woman is freed from the Law by the death of her husband
- B. Is applied to our spiritual lives
  - 1. We have been freed from the Law by the death of Christ
  - 2. Through our union with Him
  - 3. So that we now belong to Him as our beloved betrothed
    - a. The Bride of Christ as we are collectively known
  - 4. So that we are freed to bear the fruit of righteousness
    - a. Not by our response to the Law of God
    - b. But by our response to the loving influences of the Spirit of God who indwells us
  - 5. Serving in the new way of the Spirit
    - a. Not in the old way of the written code
    - b. Which before we died to the Law, simply served to arouse our sinful impulses
- C. But of course, none of this is true unless you believe, unless you trust, the Lord Jesus as your Savior
  - 1. Have you placed your trust in Him alone?