

In the Book of Romans chapter six, we see how through the death of Christ God provides deliverance from the power of sin, and the image used to illustrate it is that of a master and his slave.

The Apostle Paul then goes on in chapter seven to show how believers have been delivered also from the Law, as a means of obtaining righteousness, and the picture used to illustrate the point is that of a husband and wife. We read:

Do you not know, brothers and sisters – for I am speaking to those who know the law – that the law is binding on a person only during that person’s lifetime?

Thus, a married woman is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies, she is discharged from the law concerning the husband.

Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man, she is not an adulteress.

(Romans 7:1-4)

What does all this mean? The following exposition is taken from Matthew Henry’s *Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible* and from Watchman Nee’s classic, *the Normal Christian Life*, with some slight modifications.

In Paul's illustration, there is only one woman, representing the believer, but there are two husbands. One of these husbands is the Law, by which Paul means a covenant of works, and the other husband is Christ.

Now the woman is completely unsuitable for this first husband and cannot give him any satisfaction. But the problem lies with her and not him.

He is perfect and therefore makes demands upon her, demands that are legitimate, but she is completely unable to carry them out.

What is the solution for her? To marry the other Man, of course. However, for her to marry Christ, the first husband must first die. But God's Law can never die or pass away, it is eternal. Therefore, it is the woman who must die, if the first marriage is to be dissolved. And this is exactly how God delivered the believer from the Law:

In the same way, my friends, you have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God.

(Romans 7:4-5)

The exact same principle operates in our deliverance from the Law as in our deliverance from sin. Sin still exists, but it has no power over a dead person.

In the same way, the Law still exists and still makes demands, but such demands are binding on a person only as long as he lives; they cannot go beyond the grave!

Obviously, this does not mean that once married to Christ we can go and do our own thing. On the contrary, Paul finishes up by saying:

But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.

(Romans 7:6-7)

As a side note, some have interpreted the word “law” in Romans chapter six as a reference to the “law of sin,” but it is obvious from context and the overall message of Paul in the Book of Romans and his other Epistles that this refers to the Law of Moses.

Did You Know This?

What we have expounded above is clear enough to most Christians. But there is a fundamental truth taught in the Book of Romans and elsewhere in the New Testament that many people tend to overlook. It is that the standards required for believers under Grace are actually higher than those under the Law!

For example, the Law permitted a person to get divorced, but under Grace it is forbidden. The Law permitted people to exact payment and restitution for crimes and injustices committed against them, Grace commands love and forgiveness for the offender.

Under the Law, a person committed adultery through sexual intercourse with another, under Grace, to even look at another person with lust is considered adultery.

The Law commanded the children of Israel to give offerings and one tenth of their income for the work of the Lord and to honour Him for His bounty. Grace commands that believers give everything they have to the Lord, even their very lives, and that we do it with joy!

But does this not do away with the doctrine of Salvation by Grace through Faith alone? Absolutely not! High moral standards are the result of Salvation by Grace through Faith alone, when properly understood and lived out! Nee puts it well:

By the Body of Christ, that sinful woman has died, but being united to him in death she is united to him also in resurrection, and in power of that resurrection, hers becomes a fruitful life.

The life of the risen Lord within her empowers her for all the claims God's holiness makes upon her. The Law of God is not annulled, it is perfectly fulfilled, for the risen Lord Jesus now lives out his life in her, and his life is always well-pleasing to the Father.

To summarize, Jesus is no less demanding than the woman's first husband. But where the Law made demands and did nothing to help fulfil them, Jesus makes greater demands, but carries them out Himself in us!!

Moreover, and more important, not only does Grace produce good works and better works, they are performed with a different attitude behind them.

We see an amazing example of this in the story of Mary of Bethany, and her pouring everything she had out on Jesus. However, all the Apostles joined in with Judas in scolding her for what they considered to be a waste. Nothing has changed!

There are still people today in the Body of Christ who – being immature in their understanding of Christ's infinite worth, and not knowing the true goal of the Gospel – totally oppose and scoff at acts of deep gratitude towards Jesus such as those displayed by Mary!