

Introduction

Last Saturday, Patrick Hemstreet, a resident of Pine, Colorado was in his home office checking his email when his wife called to him from upstairs, telling him to look out the front window. Among the pine trees and aspen, Mr. Hemstreet saw a herd of about 40 elk, including a large, 600-pound bull with the tire around his neck. Mr. Hemstreet called Dawson Swanson, a wildlife official who lived nearby. The two had communicated about the elk with the tire around its neck for almost two years. Mr. Swanson immediately came over and shot the bull with a tranquilizer. Then, they began to cut the tire off. The steel belts in the tire were too tough to cut, so they had to cut the antlers off to remove the tire. Elk grow new antlers every year, so the bull will only miss this season of rutting, but the most important thing he was finally freed from this burden.

In Acts 15, Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles. There had been certain Jews that had gone to Antioch, preaching that the Gentiles had to be circumcised in order to be saved. These legalistic Jews tried to put the Gentiles under the Law, including the observance of the various feasts, washings, and circumcision. After Paul had addressed the apostles and elders, Peter addressed the group, saying, “Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?” The Jews were like this elk which had a tire around its neck. They had the Law around their neck, and they had not been able to bear it.

(Acts 15:10) “Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?”

In our text today, Paul teaches us that we have been freed from this tire around our neck. Because we have died with Christ, we have been set free from the Law of sin and death. We have been set free so that we can bear more fruit for God. We would normally think that being set free from something suggests that the thing is bad, but that is not the case with the Law. Paul said that the Law is not sin; it is holy and righteous and good. The Law exposed our sin, and our sin produced every kind of evil in us. Paul talks about the internal battle that we have because of our bondage to sin. At the end Paul wrote, “Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? {25} Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” It is Christ who has set us free from sin and the law of sin and death, so that we might have new life and be free to bear fruit for God.

Freedom from the Law

1. Freed from the Law (Rom 7:1-6)
 2. Role of the Law (Rom 7:7-12)
 3. Battle with the Flesh (Rom 7:13-23)
- Conclusion and Applications (Rom 7:24-25)

(Rom 7:1-25) “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? {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. {7} What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET." {8} But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin *is* dead. {9} I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; {10} and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; {11} for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. {12} So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. {13} Therefore did that which is good become *a cause of* death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful. {14} For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. {15} For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I *would* like to *do*, but I am doing the very thing I hate. {16} But if I do the very thing I do not want *to do*, I agree with the Law, *confessing* that the Law is good. {17} So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. {18} For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good *is* not. {19} For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. {20} But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. {21} I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. {22} For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, {23} but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. {24} Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? {25} Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin."

1. Freed from the Law (Rom 7:1-6)

In Romans 6, Paul taught us that we have been freed from sin. Because we have been buried with Him in baptism, we have died to sin, and been set free. Death is no longer to be a master over us; we are to be slaves of righteousness. Now, Paul turns to being freed from the Law. Paul begins with the example of marriage, saying, a 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 her husband. "Till death do us part" is a common wedding vow, communicating this marriage principle.

(Rom 7:1-2) "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? {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."

Paul continued with the illustration of marriage, and said if a woman is joined to another man while her husband is living, she shall be called an adulteress. However, if her husband dies, she is free from the law. He has used two terms, released and free. Both of these terms indicate that a woman is free from the law concerning her husband if he dies.

(Rom 7:3) "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."

The Major League playoffs are going on right now, and I watched the Atlanta Braves eliminate the Milwaukee Brewers last week. I watched the pitchers set up the batters. They would pitch a curve ball or change up on the low side of the strike zone, and then throw a fast ball on the low side. These pitchers know how to set up a batter for pitches to strike them out. Paul is not playing baseball, but he has set us up for the pitch that he wants to throw.

Paul said that we were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ so that we might be joined to another, that is Christ who was raised from the dead, so that we might bear fruit for God. Using the marriage principle, we have died and are now free to be joined to Christ. Jesus' death not only set us free from sin, but also has freed us from the Law of sin.

(Rom 7:4) "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."

I like how Paul throws in the statement, "that we might bear fruit for God." I love fruit trees and have been working on my landscape plan, which will include various fruit trees. In the spiritual, I love bearing fruit. I pray for fruit in my life. In John 15, Jesus said that God has chosen and appointed us to bear much fruit. Jesus has freed us from the Law so that we can be joined to Him and bear fruit.

(John 15:16) "You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you."

There are two kinds of fruit, good fruit and bad fruit. While we were in the flesh, the sinful passions in us bore fruit for death. That is not the kind of fruit that we want, but that is what we produced before coming to Christ. But now that we have been released from the Law, having died to what we were bound to, and have been joined to Christ, we can serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter. We now can bear the fruit of the Spirit, not the fruit of the flesh.

(Rom 7:5-6) "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."

2. **Role of the Law** (Rom 7:7-13)

Paul asked, "What shall we say then? Is the Law sin?" Being set free from the Law so that we can be joined to Christ suggests that the Law is bad, but that is not the case. Tires are a good thing, but the tire around the elk's neck needed to be removed. Paul is now going to give us an understanding of the role of the Law. He answered, "May it never be!" You and I would not have known about sin except through the Law. In Romans 3, Paul wrote that through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. We would not have known about coveting, stealing, or any other sin unless the Law had been given.

(Rom 7:7) "What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET."

(Rom 3:20) “because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin.”

We live in a day where people are trying to remove moral absolutes. They want to be free to do whatever they want without it being called sin, so they remove God, the Bible, and anything that would declare their actions to be sinful. Unfortunately, God’s invisible attributes have been made known and they are without excuse. Furthermore, the Law has been given, whether people want to accept it or not.

When the Law was given, and sin was revealed, sin began to produce every kind of evil in our lives. Paul uses the example of coveting, and said that “sin, taking the opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind.” It was not the Law that was bad; it was sin inside of us that produced sin. The knowledge and awareness of sin produced more sin. It was sin that deceived us and killed us. The commandment is holy and righteous and good, and it was given to bring life. So, we have been freed from the Law of sin and death

(Rom 7:8-12) “But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law *sin is dead*. {9} I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; {10} and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; {11} for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. {12} So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.”

Paul’s next question is, “did that which is good become a cause of death for me?” Again, his answer is “may it never be!” The law did was not a cause of death for us. Again, the Law revealed sin in our lives. Through the Law, sin was shown to be utterly sinful. The Greek word that is translated as utterly is *hyperbole* (Strong’s G5236). *Hyper* means over or beyond, and *bole* comes from *ballo*, which means to throw or cast. The Law revealed that sin is thrown beyond or exceedingly beyond sinful. The purpose of the Law was to reveal sin to us, and to show how bad sin is. The Law is not sin, does not cause sin, and does not cause death. The Law is holy, righteous, and good.

(Rom 7:13) “Therefore did that which is good become *a cause of* death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.”

3. **Battle with the Flesh** (Rom 7:14-23)

There are two ways of viewing this next part of Romans 7, and scholars have debated this for centuries. Paul has been talking about our life prior to Christ, and how we were dead in our sins and were slaves of sin. He said that we have died to sin and have been set free from sin. In verse fourteen, Paul said, “I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.” If we have been freed from the bondage of sin, it would appear that this is speaking of our life before Christ. But, Paul says that he is practicing the very things that he hates and that he agrees with the Law. Most unbelievers do not agree with the Law. Most unbelievers are not living with a sensitivity to their sin. Most unbelievers think they are basically good. So, in that sense, this passage is speaking of a believer who has a contrite spirit, who knows and agrees with the Law, has a desire to do what is right, but has an internal struggle with sin. No matter which view a person takes, the truth is that believers continue to sin. We are not to live in sin, and be enslaved to sin, but we have a fleshly body and we continue to sin. We have a battle within to live a life that glorifies God.

(Rom 7:14-18) “For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. {15} For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I *would* like to *do*, but I am doing the very thing I hate. {16} But if I do the very thing I do not want to *do*, I agree with the Law, *confessing* that the Law is good. {17} So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. {18} For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good *is* not.”

One key to understanding the passage is to look at it from a grammatical standpoint. Up until verse fourteen, Paul has primarily been using the past tense. In Romans 7:15, he begins to talk about his current life in the present tense. He says, “for what I am doing...for I am not practicing...but I am doing.” This internal battle with the flesh is not Paul’s pre-Christian life; this is the struggle with the flesh that he is going through at the time. This is the Apostle Paul, the one who God used to author half of the New Testament. This is a man that preached the gospel to kings and governors. This is a man that healed many people of various diseases and even raised a young man from the dead. This is a man that God greatly used, but who had the same struggles that we all have.

One more key to this passage is the word flesh, which is *sarx* in the Greek. In verse five, Paul is talking of his life before Christ and he was in the flesh. In verse fourteen, Paul says, “I am of flesh.” Even though we have been freed from the bondage of sin in the flesh, we still have this fleshly body that has fleshly desires. We are of flesh now, but we do not have to be in the flesh. God’s spirit is in us now and there is a struggle between living in the Spirit and living in the flesh. In Romans 8 Paul is going to discuss living in the Spirit rather than in the flesh, but in our passage, he is just speaking about this struggle that we have. Therefore, I believe that this passage is speaking of the Christian’s struggle with the flesh. The interpretation is mainly a theological discussion because Christians struggle with sin, and they have to learn how to overcome so that they can bear fruit for God.

(Rom 7:5) “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.”

(Rom 7:14) “For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.”

On Friday, October 15, during my quiet time, I was reading Proverbs 15. Verse one says, “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” In my Bible software I have the ability to write notes and insights about verses, which I frequently take advantage of. I add Bible cross references, insights, research, applications, outlines, applications, and other things. On Friday I typed in the illustration from the 1994 Dominion Open in Richmond, Virginia. I had pulled a seven-iron into the left greenside bunker. When I got near the bunker a lady on the other side of the gallery ropes began chewing me out for not yelling, “Fore.” My ball was in the bunker and thirty feet away from the gallery ropes, so I had not come close to hitting anyone in the gallery. My FLESH wanted to react to this woman’s rants at me, but the Spirit inside of me reminded me of Proverbs 15 and that I needed to give a gentle answer, which would turn away her wrath. So, I humbly apologized and asked her to forgive me for not yelling, “Fore.” The countenance of this woman softened immediately. This lady followed me the rest of the week. I share this story because my FLESH wanted to give it to this woman, but the Holy Spirit was giving me different instructions. There was a battle going on inside of me. I had a choice to make in that moment. Was I going to give in to that fleshly desire to tell the lady off, or was I going to follow the timely reminder from the Holy Spirit to respond with a gentle answer.

In the late 90's, I was with a member of the church I was pastoring, and we passed a Coca Cola billboard. The billboard prompted him to humbly share with me the internal battle that he was having. He was a former cocaine addict, and he used to heat up his cocaine in coke cans. Every time he saw a Coca Cola can or picture of one, he was reminded of the intense pleasure from getting high on cocaine. He knew it was wrong to be drunk with wine or with drugs, but he still had strong fleshly desires for this drug. This was the battle that he had to fight on a daily basis.

When you and I become Christians, we do not die in the flesh and leave this earth right away. Even though we identify with the death of Christ and are freed from the bondage of sin, we have to deal with our fleshly desires. We are raised up as a new creation, and the old things pass away. We are justified and God sees us as righteous because of what Christ did for us. However, we still have fleshly desires that we have to battle. We have to renew our minds so that we are not conformed to the world, but are transformed into Christ's image. It is a process and it is a battle.

This week I saw a news story of a Baptist pastor that was arrested. He had a number of DUI's on his record, and this latest incident probably happened while he was intoxicated. I saw a lot of Christians in the prison where I served as a Chaplain. These were Christians who had succumbed to their flesh and were paying dearly for it. The Apostle Paul is being transparent with us and making the gospel message relevant to all of us. We all struggle with this flesh in this life.

The Law is spiritual and we are of flesh, sold into the bondage of sin. As believers, we can get into the bondage of sin. If we are honest, like Paul is in this passage, we do and practice things that we don't want to do. The problem is not the Law, because the Law is good. It is sin that dwells in us that causes us to sin.

(Rom 7:14-18) "For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. {15} For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I *would* like to *do*, but I am doing the very thing I hate. {16} But if I do the very thing I do not want to *do*, I agree with the Law, *confessing* that the Law is good. {17} So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. {18} For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good *is* not."

We see a battle inside of us. On one hand there is a desire to do good and a willingness to do good, but we practice the very evil that we do not want. Paul said it is no longer us doing it, but the sin dwelling in us. We have sin and evil present in our lives, and in our inner man we concur with the Law of God. Paul said that there is a different law in the members of our body that are waging war against the law of our minds, and it is making us prisoners of the law of sin which is in our members. Christians can be made a prisoner of the law of sin. I have seen lots of Christians who were prisoners. Even though Christ has declared them to be free, they are not walking in freedom.

(Rom 7:19-23) "For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. {20} But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. {21} I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. {22} For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, {23} but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members."

Conclusion and Applications (Rom 7:24-25)

Notice Paul's next statement and question. "Wretched man that I am!" As a mature man of God, Paul hates the sin inside of him. He hates the struggle with sin, and declares, "Wretched man that I am!" Paul then asks, "Who will set me free from the body of this death?" I believe that believers have been set free, and continue to be set free as they continue to follow God.

(Rom 7:24-25) "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? {25} Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin."

In prison ministry I found that when someone asked the question that Paul asked, and had a desire to be set free, they were on the right track. There was hope for them, and most of them would get free. When someone did not have this contrite spirit about their sins, they would remain in that condition. Jesus told the Pharisees that because they said they could see, their sin remained. We have an answer; Jesus Christ our Lord is the one that can set us free, but we need to have a contrite spirit and a desire to be free. Paul's answer is, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" Jesus Christ is the one that sets us free from the body of death. When we have died with Christ, we have died to sin and we are no longer under the Law of sin and death. Jesus Christ is the One that sets us free. He is also the One who continues to set us free as we serve Him.

(John 9:41) "Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.'"

When a person receives Christ into their life, they identify with the death and burial of Christ and they are freed from sin. They are no longer slaves of sin, but are slaves of righteousness. Believers are justified and declared righteous. Believers are sanctified and made holy. In the face of temptations, we are to consider that we have died with Christ and are not slaves of sin, but of righteousness. We are to refuse to allow sin to reign in our lives. We are to present ourselves to God and our members to Him as instruments of righteousness.

(Rom 6:7) "for he who has died is freed from sin."

(Rom 6:18) "and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness."

We have to do these things because we are in a struggle, an internal struggle with our flesh. Our new man is righteous and wants to please God, and our flesh is sinful and has evil desires. Therefore, there is an internal battle that all of us face. Who can set us free from this body of death? "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Jesus, our High Priest, was tempted in all things and without sin. Jesus is able to come to our aid in times of temptation. Jesus is the One that has set us free from sin, and from the Law of sin and death. He is also the One that continues to set us free.

There may be someone today that is struggling with sin. Jesus Christ is the One who died so that our sins would be forgiven, and so that we could be set free from our sins. Jesus is the One that can bring you out of bondage. If you would like to receive Jesus into your life today, there are a couple of requirements. First, you must believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that He died for our sins, and was raised up by God the Father. Second, you must confess Jesus as Lord, which means

that you are submitting your life to Him. If you believe and want to confess Jesus as Lord, I encourage you to pray with me.

Jesus, I do believe that You are the Son of God, that You died for our sins, were buried, and were raised up by God the Father. I ask You to come into my life today. I confess You as Lord. I want to serve You and live for You. I ask You to forgive me of my sins, and free me from the bondage of sin. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

There may be others that are struggling with your flesh. My encouragement to you is to keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, who can deliver you from any and all sins. He is our help in time of need and temptation. He is the One that sets us free. He is the One who overcame and helps us to overcome. If you are struggling today with sin, I encourage you to speak with me after the service. Paul ended by saying that with his mind he is serving the Law of God. I would like to help you renew your mind in the area that you are struggling so that with your mind you can serve God.

Q & A

Is there anyone here that never has fleshly or sinful thoughts or desires?

Does anyone relate to the elk with a tire around its neck? You felt like you had a weight and burden around you, and then you got freed? (TESTIMONIES)

I was driven to play golf. There is nothing wrong with golf, but it was my master. When God took that tire off from my neck, I was freed up, and have been freed up to serve God. Joe Warner knows a lot of professional golfers, and he said I am the only one that he knows that was free.

When you came to Christ, did you have a greater awareness of your sin than before?

Introduction (Acts 15:10, Rom 7:1-25)

1. **Freed from the Law** (Rom 7:1-6, John 15:16)

2. **Role of the Law** (Rom 7:7-13, Rom 3:20)

3. **Battle with the Flesh** (Rom 7:14-23, Rom 7:5)

Conclusion and Applications (Rom 7:24-25, 6:7, 6:18, 10:9-10)