

The New Marriage

The Beauty of the Bride – Part I
Union with Christ

Romans 7:1-4

Introduction

In Romans, chapter 6, Paul took us to the graveyard and taught us that we died in Christ, were buried in Christ, and then, were resurrected in Christ to newness in life.

In chapter 7, Paul moves from the graveyard to a wedding scene. He shows a wedding album to us, where we discover that we are in the picture.

In chapter 6, we died in Christ, but in chapter 7, we are married to Christ. In other words, in chapter 6, we were buried with Christ; but in chapter 7, we are the bride of Christ.

The good news is that every believer who experienced the burial of chapter 6, also experiences the wedding of chapter 7, and ultimately, the victory of chapter 8.

Now, before we dive in, there are a number of opinions about chapter 7 concerning who Paul was referring to. These opinions include that: Paul was referring to someone under the law; Paul was referring to carnal Christians; Paul was referring to Jews who wanted to return to the Old Testament system of law and sacrifices; Paul was talking about himself and every other Christian; Paul was talking about himself and nobody else. One commentator just threw up his hands and said, “We ought to just forget what Paul said and try to figure out what Paul meant.”

The answer to the dilemma is discovered by taking this chapter at face value, like every chapter before it. The text itself answers the question. From

verse 7 through the end of chapter 7, Paul uses the personal pronoun “I” thirty times! In fact, if you also add Paul’s use of personal pronouns; such as “me,” “my,” and “myself,” in this chapter, he refers to *himself* forty-seven times in nineteen verses.¹

This is Paul’s story! This chapter is intensely personal to Paul! And, you will discover that this chapter is not only Paul’s autobiography, it is the truth about your story and mine today, as well.

Now, Paul, the master teacher, begins these next paragraphs, which we call chapter 7, by delivering a principle. He then, illuminates the principle with an illustration. He follows that illustration with an application.

The Principle of Law and Limitation

We could call Paul’s opening statement, in Romans, chapter 7, verse 1, *The Principle of Law and Limitation*. Look at verse 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 some believe Paul is referring to the *Torah*, which is the Jewish Law delivered through Moses. However, this phrase in the Greek New Testament lacks the definite article. You could literally translate this, “Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know law) . . .”. In other words, Paul is speaking about law in general.

Paul assumes that every Roman, every Greek, every Jewish man and woman would understand law in general. He is asking a rhetorical question. He knows they know the truth about law. So, his question is, “Don’t you know that law has jurisdiction over a person, but only while they are living?”

You know that, don’t you?! You cannot take a corpse to court. You cannot fine someone for parking tickets after they have died. You cannot bring a dead person before a judge and jury to convict them of crimes.

Lee Harvey Oswald, the accused assassin of former President John F. Kennedy, was never brought to trial for murder because he himself was murdered before his trial began. [That ended the inquiry – the law could do nothing more against Oswald, because Oswald was dead.]ⁱⁱ

The limitation of the law is that it can only enforce, monitor, denounce, instruct, convict, sentence, and condemn the living. Law has power only over those who are alive. Its jurisdiction; its influence; its sway; its verdict only affects the living.

The Illustration of Marriage and Covenant

Now Paul will illustrate the jurisdiction of law over the living only, with the marriage covenant. Notice verse 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.

Of all the illustrations Paul could have used to describe the limitations of law, I find it absolutely fascinating that Paul, by means of the Holy Spirit’s influence, would choose this one. Look at this verse 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.

What is so amazing about this principle and illustration is that Paul is speaking rhetorically! He is speaking with the assumption that his audience agrees with the biblical teaching on the permanence of marriage . . . [this is the startling point] . . . there is also the assumption by Paul that those who are ignorant of what the Bible says about marriage would still understand the natural law that says when two people join together in marriage, it is for life.ⁱⁱⁱ

In other words, as Paul has already declared in chapter 1, there is an intuitive knowledge of God’s law. We could call that natural law. It is law understood without every having read the Ten Commandments.

C. S. Lewis wrote that natural law is revealed in the way people talk. “That’s my seat, I was there first.” “Leave him alone; he isn’t doing you any harm.” “Why should you cut in first?” “Give me a bit of your orange; I gave you a bit of mine.” “Come on now, you promised.”^{iv}

Lewis stated that people understood standards of conduct simply because they had law encoded on their hearts.

I love watching the television show *Candid Camera* because it illustrates the tension of natural law. I loved one clip where a guy in a restaurant would come in and immediately pocket the tip left at the counter – while the nearest customer watched with his mouth hanging open. Why? Because it is wrong; it is stealing; it doesn’t belong to you, it belongs to the waitress. This is true, even though there is no note written to the waitress nor is there a notarized statement declaring that the tip is the property of the waitress.

I watched one *Candid Camera* show where they had someone come into a restaurant, sit at the counter next to someone, and begin eating food off of that other person’s plate. The waitress asks, “Do you want to order?” “Na, I like this just fine,” while that other person just sits there, stunned.

I read some time ago, about a woman who bought a bag of cookies at the airport, while she waited in the terminal for her flight. While seated there, the terminal became crowded with people and a man sat near her, with one seat between them. After a while, the woman reached down and ate one of her cookies while she read her magazine. Then, to her shock, she noticed the man reach down and take a cookie out of the package and pop it into his mouth. She glared at him; he smiled back her. She did not know what to do. A minute later, she picked up another cookie, and so did he – nodding at her and smiling. She was infuriated now. She took the last cookie and stuffed it into her mouth as they got up to board the plane. She fumed her way to her seat, sat down, buckled up, then opened her purse – and there lay her package of cookies, still in the wrapper!

What had made the woman so angry? And what made the man so nice about it? She thought he was a thief, violating her rights and taking her property,

and so she was rightfully angry. He was exercising patience and kindness toward a woman who was evidently, out of her mind. Both exercised compliance to natural law – a gift from God that produces civility and order, among a thousand other things.

In the book of Romans, Paul never condemns the unbeliever for not knowing the law – the truth about God as creator and judge; he simply says that they have the law of God written on their hearts. He writes that they are condemned for knowing certain truths about God and suppressing it; denying it; mocking it; distorting it.

Paul is assuming that everyone, everywhere in the world, understands the natural law that marriage is a binding covenant.

Someone might say, “Well Paul lived in a different era . . . marriage was not as sophisticated in the village like it is in the metropolis . . . everyone back then lived differently.”

The truth is just the opposite. The Jewish society was awash with divorce. Women were beasts of burden and could be discarded all too easily. The rabbis of Paul’s day redefined Moses’ words that a man who married a woman could then divorce her after finding her to be unclean or an adulteress. The word “unclean” became the subject of debate within the Jewish community. One rabbi said that only adultery could allow for divorce. Another rabbi taught that “uncleanness” could be anything displeasing. Rabbi Hillel, a famous rabbi, taught that a wife was unclean if she spoiled her husband’s dinner or put too much salt in it. Talking with men on the streets, saying something against her mother-in-law, was uncleanness. Rabbi Akiba even insisted that if a man found a woman who was prettier than his wife, the wife became unclean in his eyes. He could divorce her, send her out, and marry the prettier one.

When Paul wrote of one man and one woman for life, that was radical.

The pagan Greek world around Paul was even worse. Prostitution, homosexuality, lesbianism, and pedophilia abounded in the Greek world. Most of the emperors were bisexual. Even in Greek society, heterosexuality was considered simplistic and prudish. Wives were simply taken to bear legitimate heirs to the family fortune. Demosthenes, the orator from Athens, wrote, “We have prostitutes for pleasure, we have concubines for daily cohabitation,

and wives to bear legitimate children and guard the household affairs.”

The Roman view of marriage was just as corrupt. Jerome, an ancient writer, tells of one Roman woman who married her twenty-third husband, and she was his twenty-first wife! Marriage, in Roman times, became little more than legalized prostitution. One Roman writer, named Juvenal, wrote that, “women vacated their home and flitted from one marriage to another, wearing out their bridal veils.”^v

When Paul wrote, basically, “I know you know it’s true, that a man and a woman belong to one another for life,” it was radical news to a corrupt world. His statement about a life-long bond was as strange to first century Athens as it is today, in twenty-first century America. However, Paul assumed they knew, and we know, this self-evident truth that the covenant of marriage is for life.

Paul goes on to add another truth. Look at verse 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.

Paul is not attempting, by the way, to deliver instruction on the nature of marriage and divorce. In other passages, such as in I Corinthians chapter 7, Paul will teach that the bond of marriage is violated and can be permanently broken by adultery and abandonment.

Paul’s point in this passage is that apart from the exceptions to the marriage covenant, brought about by sinful man, God intends marriage to last a lifetime. “‘Til death do us part” is not a nice idea, it is God’s idea and has been stamped on the heart of everyone, everywhere in the world.

The unbeliever does not look over the wedding vows and say, “Look, that part about, ‘til death do us part,’ that’s only for Christians.”

No, the unbeliever says those words too! An unbelieving bride-to-be does not stand at the altar and say, “It really doesn’t matter if he dumps me in twenty years for a younger woman, I’m gonna enjoy him while I have him.”

No, marriage is for life.

Paul’s point is simply this – death nullifies the union of marriage. And, he assumed everyone understood that. They might deny it, or refute it, or

sin against it, but they still know intuitively that the marriage covenant is set aside after death.

Let me review the principle and illustration, as well as prepare for the application:

- *The principle:* law has jurisdiction upon only those who are alive;
- *The illustration:* the binding covenant of marriage is only active while the spouse is alive;
- *The application:* we are bound to the law as long as we are alive.

The Application of Death and Re-Marriage

So, we have a major problem. We are bound to the law, and because the law is not a living being, it cannot die. That means, in this analogy, we are married to the law. Therefore, all the rules, standards, and requirements of the law which we can never keep will torment us; the law is our husband and he will never die.

So, it is right then, that someone has to die to free us from the law in order for us to become the bride of Christ.

We will call the solution that Paul gives, *The Application of Death and Re-Marriage*. Notice verse 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 . . .

The law does not die, you die.

That takes us back to chapter 6 where we read that God views us, by faith in Christ, to have died in Him, to have been buried in Him, and to have been raised to new life in Him.

We died, so the covenant to law is broken. That law with its holy requirements that we cannot keep; that law which serves as a barrier between us and heaven; that law which condemns us and proves us guilty – by faith in Christ, we died in Him and rose in Him.

So, the law has lost its jurisdiction! It has lost its voice! It has lost the right of a husband to rule his wife!

We belong to another man – the God man – our husband, Jesus Christ! Your marriage to the law was dissolved by death – your death in Christ, Who died to sin, and having fulfilled the law, rose again and

you in Him. Having died, you are now free to remarry.

Christ offers this to those who come to Him, who felt the weight of our sin and our futile attempts to keep the law, who heard His Spirit calling, “You who are weary and heavy-laden, come to this One and find rest for your souls.”

You came, and the Holy Spirit presided over this mysterious new birth – this death, burial, and resurrection – this marriage arranged by the Father, to the Groom, His Son, Jesus Christ.

The Spirit asks, “Will you take Him – to be your wedded husband?”

And you answer, “I do.”

In sickness and in health?

“Yes, that too.”

For better or for worse?

“Yes, no matter what!”

“‘Till death do you part?”

“Oh, death will never part us, for I have already died in Him and I now live in Him forever. Even though I will die physically, I have already been given eternal life; our covenant can never be broken apart by death.”

And the Spirit says, “Amen. And to you who have become His bride, you shall now take the name of your husband, the name Christian!”

Have you ever been to a wedding? Names matter at weddings.

A few years ago, when I did not have a wonderful staff of pastors to carry out the duties of pastoring, I performed almost all of the weddings. One weekend I married a couple and the groom’s name was Richard. The next weekend I married another couple and the groom’s name was Robert. During the vows, I said to the bride, “Do you take Richard to be your lawfully wedded husband?” The problem was, this guy was Robert. Everyone froze, and then burst into laughter, primarily at my red face.

I had to get it right! The bride did not say, “Aah, call him Henry, for all I care, doesn’t matter to me!”

No, get the name right!

In the book of Acts, chapter 4, verse 12, the apostle Paul said,

. . . there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.

I take Jesus Christ – to be my lawfully wedded husband! No other – I take Him!

For those who have trusted in this One named Jesus Christ, may I remind you where we are headed?

In Revelation, chapter 19, we are given a glimpse of the marriage feast between the church and Jesus Christ, just before the inauguration of the millennial kingdom, which many believe will take place on earth. We are dressed in fine robes and the wedding feast begins.

It is interesting that the marriage supper is called, “the marriage supper of the Lamb” – not King, Lord of Lords, Messiah, Son of God – but Lamb! The one title that Christ wants emphasized for all eternity is “the Lamb,” for it speaks of His love for the church and the price He paid to purchase her as His bride.^{vi}

Because Jesus Christ was willing to die, and you in Him, you are able to be pronounced His bride.

I have news for you, Christian, there is a wedding ceremony coming and you are in it! Can you see the pictures? There you are smiling with undiminished joy, standing next to your eternal Bridegroom. I do not know how space dimensions will be altered, so you might picture yourself at that wedding supper in line somewhere with twenty million other brides who are closer to the cake. You will never get any punch!

I do not know how God will arrange the new world, but the ceremony is intensely personal. There you stand next to the Lamb of God, your Redeemer from bondage to the law; your Savior from the evil one and from yourself; the One who bought you with His life, as a precious bride unto Himself.

You may remember, after your wedding, how strange it sounded to say, “She’s my wife,” or “I’m her husband,” or “I’m married.” It sounded strange to say, “She belongs to me,” or “I belong to her.”

How many of you thought you married the perfect husband? How many of you thought you married the perfect wife? Do not raise your hand, just look over and say, “I did.” You are lying, but you are wise!

Paul has declared the principle, the illustration, and the application in this great text that we have been released from the jurisdiction of our former spouse, the law, by means of our death in Christ, and we have been joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead.

You, Christian, have been married to the perfect Husband; you belong to Christ, forever. And, guess what?! He belongs to you! He belongs to you . . . forever and forever and forever!

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ⁱ Alva J. McClain, Romans: The Gospel of God’s Grace (Winona Lake, IN, BMH Books, 1973), p. 151.

ⁱⁱ John MacArthur Jr., Romans (Chicago, IL, Moody Press, 1991), p. 359.

ⁱⁱⁱ Holman New Testament Commentary: Volume 6 (Nashville, TN, Broadman & Holman, 2000), p. 217.

^{iv} Quoted by James Montgomery Boice in Romans Vol. 2 (Baker Book House, 1991), p. 718.

^v John MacArthur, The Family (GTU Publications), p. 20.

^{vi} Warren Wiersbe, Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the New Testament (Victor Books, 1992), p. 850.