December 8/9, 2012

The Gospel Story: Remarried

A Study of Romans

Romans 7:1-13

Pastor Bryan Clark

So let's imagine that you have some friends; it's a husband and wife, and they're coming over to the house for dinner. But when they show up, there's an extra guy. And so you introduce yourself to this extra guy and the wife says, "This is my new husband." And you say, "Excuse me. I thought Fred was your husband." She says, "Fred is my husband. I've been married to Fred a long time. Fred's all right. I get a little bored with Fred; decided I wanted to try another husband, so I married another husband. Now I have two husbands." What would you be thinking? I know what you'd be thinking. You'd be thinking: there is no way that's gonna work. You're also thinking: this is kind of silly. We would never do anything like that. Would we? There are still many Christians who continue to struggle to find freedom in their Christian life. I would suggest to you, it's entirely possible the reason is because you're trying to make this marriage work with two husbands. And I'm telling you: "That will never work!" That's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to Romans, Chapter 7.

In chapter 6 Paul taught us that the moment we trusted Christ as Savior, we died to sin. The old man that was in Adam died. He's so dead we buried him. But I didn't just die; I was raised to new life—made alive in God—to live the life that God offers me. I should no longer be enslaved to sin, because I'm not under the Law; I'm under grace. But there's still this struggle to understand: what does that mean? One might call Romans chapter 7 *"the struggling chapter*," because that's what it's about. 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?** (*NASB, Romans 7:1)

Notice that Paul is addressing **brethren**, clearly addressing Christians here. And he's addressing people that **know the law**, probably referring to the Law of Moses. Now these could be Jewish Christians, but also could include Gentile Christians, because in first century Rome many Gentiles actually knew the Jewish Law well and sought to live under it. What we do know is he's writing to people that know the law. And one of the Rabbi maxims, or Rabbi sayings, is that basically people were obligated to the law until they died. You can imagine somebody asking the question, "How long is someone obligated to the law?" Answer: until you die. Once you die, you're no longer obligated. So Paul takes that and applies that to the theology he's trying to teach. 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. 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.** (Vs. 2-3)

Now there's a lot of confusion around those two verses, and I think unnecessarily, so just a couple of comments. Number one: verses 2 and 3 have no intent to inform our discussion about what the Bible says about divorce and remarriage. There have been a lot of crazy ideas over the years that have come out of these two verses, trying to apply to that subject. That would be totally foreign to

what Paul is talking about here, and it's just a misuse of the text. Second of all, this is not an allegory. An allegory would be where there's a corresponding relationship with every detail of the story to the theology he's trying to teach. If you try to do that, it doesn't work. It's just really confusing. But it's not an allegory; it's a very simple illustration. The illustration is this: *A woman is married to her husband, and as long as she is married to her husband, her obligation according to the covenant, according to the law, is to him. If she chooses to marry a second husband and introduce him into the mix, that would be considered adultery. But if the first husband dies, based on that death, she is released from her obligation to that covenant and is now free to remarry*. Simple. Verse 4:

> **Therefore** *(in light of this)***, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law** *(how?)* **through the body of Christ** *(meaning when you identified with the crucified 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.**

Notice the language parallels the language of the illustration. He's simply saying at one time you were in Adam and, as someone who is in Adam, you were married to Adam, under the Law—that was the arrangement. But the moment you trusted Christ as Savior, that man—that old man—died and, because of the death, the obligation to the first husband ended, which set you free to remarry. Who did you remarry? You remarried Christ, now under grace, in order that you might bear fruit for God, in order that you might live in that freedom and live according to the righteousness of God. He goes on to say, verse 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.**

What he's saying is: when you were married to Adam, that was a bad marriage. It brought a lot of shame and guilt and heartache. There are a couple of terms in verse 5 we need to explain. First of all, one of the things that makes Romans complicated is when we start introducing terms into the discussion that aren't actually in Romans. So I've tried to be very careful to just use the terminology used in the text. So if you have an NIV—a New International Version—translation, you see the introduction of the words *sinful nature*. In my opinion, that is a very unfortunate translation, and really causes confusion. Everywhere in Romans where you see *sinful nature*, you need to make a mental note: that's not what the original Greek text says. It's the Greek word *sarx*, which is the word for flesh, and many of us believe that the flesh and the sinful nature are not synonymous concepts. So that really confuses things. What does he mean by **in the flesh**? First of all, sometimes, including in Romans, flesh is just like *flesh and blood*, human. But other times it has more of a holistic, kind of a theological meaning, and usually it's in reference to who I am apart from God, in other words, what I can do on my own. In this case, the language is **in the flesh**. In these middle chapters of Romans, the language becomes very technical—you have to really watch the details. **In the flesh** is synonymous in this case with *being in Adam*. In other words, when I was in Adam, because of my sin, I was cut off from God. Therefore, this is who I was without God in the picture: in the flesh. I was married to Adam. I was under the Law, and what it was producing in my life is death. He goes on to say:

> **For while we were** *(past tense)* **in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were *aroused* by the Law...** (Vs 5a)

Very interesting terminology—he doesn't say *revealed by the Law*, even though that's true. He actually says **aroused by the Law**. This is a very important concept to understand for all of us that have a bent toward legalism, which by the way is all of us! Legalism does not make you sin less. It makes you sin more. This has been a consistent message in the middle part of Romans. Why is that? Answer: because when you look into the mirror of God's Law, you see a sinner. You see someone who isn't measuring up, someone who is full of sin, someone who is full of shame and guilt, somebody that isn't cutting it and, because that's who you see in the mirror, that's how you identify yourself. And because that becomes your identity, you ultimately live what you believe to be true about yourself. So you don't sin less; you sin more, because that's who you are; that's your identity. The sin pushes the rebellion button—it says, "Don't tell me what to do! If you tell me what not to do, it makes me want to do it all the more." And so the Law actually arouses rebellion, and it arouses sin and creates this identity.

> **...the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of the body to bear fruit for death.** (Vs. 5b)

In other words, it was a really bad marriage.

> **But now…**

If you're inclined to mark your Bible, I would circle those words. They're a big deal, because it's saying that *was* true in the old marriage, **but now** something has dramatically changed.

> **But now we have been released from the Law,**

Notice the language as it relates to the illustration in verses 2 and 3: we're released from the obligation, from the Law. How?

> **...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.** (Vs. 6)

When you were in the flesh, you were in Adam. You were married to Adam, *under the Law*, and what it brought was sin and death. But when that old man who was married to Adam died, that marriage was over. I no longer have a legal obligation to that marriage, and it frees me up to remarry. Whom did I remarry? I remarried Christ, *under grace*, which now—rather than being guided by the letter of the Law—I'm guided by the life of the Spirit, and that's a radically different way to live!

What Paul is trying to say is that what the Law could never do for us, the Spirit of life has done for us. He's trying to get people to let go of the old marriage in order to enter fully into the new marriage—in order to experience freedom. There is always this temptation to try to blend the two. People do it all the time: "*I know now I'm remarried to Christ, but I think I'd like to have a little affair with Adam. I don't think Jesus will mind*." Trust me: He minds! The two operating systems are not compatible in any way. That will never work. You can't make that relationship work. When Paul wrote to the Galatians, he told them: "If you add one work of the Law to grace, grace ceases to be grace." These two husbands don't get along, so you gotta choose one or the other—an abusive marriage or a marriage full of love and life.

Let me see if I can illustrate for you sometimes how the confusion plays out by diagramming it. I think, for years, this is what I understood—that the real tension as a Christian is between legalism and license—that's where the tension lies. Legalism is life under the Law: we don't want to get too far to that end of the scale, because you can't be saved by works. But at the other end is too much talk of grace, which produces license, and people do as they please under the umbrella of grace. We don't want that! So, the balanced Christian life is to find the balance somewhere in the middle. You can already hear from that terminology what I'm saying: I'm still married to both husbands; we just have to figure out a way to help them get along. That whole illustration is flawed!

In addition to that, people often said, "If I struggle to find the balance and I'm going to err, I should probably err to the conservative side because the license side is disastrous—we don't want that!" So if I'm going to err, I should err to the conservative side, which was often, then, the rationale for legalism. But to err to the conservative side is still theological error. The whole diagram is bogus.

I think, correctly understood, the tension is between the flesh and the Spirit. Read the book of Galatians. That's where the tension is—the life that I can live on my own versus the life I can live in the Spirit, and there isn't really this in-between stuff. Either you're married to Adam or you're married to Christ, in terms of how you live your life—because the two don't get along. If you go to the flesh end of the diagram, I think, biblically, the New Testament writers make a case that the flesh manifests itself in one of two ways: either through license or through legalism and often people flip back and forth between the two. It's true of individuals. I think it's true of generations. We've probably all known people that, at one time they were wild—license, out of control—but then all of a sudden they become really religious, and they become really legalistic. Or you've known people who were really legalistic, and then next thing you know they seem to have gone the other way, to license—and anything's permissible under grace. You see it generationally. You see a generation that grew up under legalism swings to license—anything is permissible. And then you find a generation that grew up under license, and they swing to legalism because it feels like nothing is nailed down—everything's out of control. The reason that happens is because all of that activity is at the flesh end of the diagram. They're just two different manifestations of the same thing. The only way to break free from that bad marriage is to understand: "I've been remarried to Christ, and now I'm under grace, and now it's the Sprit of life that sets me free." With the power of the Spirit, I am able to live a life I never could have lived simply by myself. Verse 7:

> **What shall we say then? Is the Law sin?**

That's interesting that he asks this question. I would suggest to you that so far in the book of Romans, Paul's conversation regarding the Law has been primarily negative. I would say, if I've done a good job of teaching the text, that would have been felt. Some people have said, "Was the Law bad?" Well, that's exactly what Paul's readers were feeling, because primarily he's saying: In terms of the gospel story and the ability to experience the freedom in Christ, the Law has been presented in negative terms, so much so that the question comes up—"Then, is it bad? Is it sinful?" And his answer is very strong: "Absolutely not. It's not bad at all. It's actually very good."

> **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."** (Vs. 7b)

What Paul is saying is that the Law is actually very good, because the Law reveals sin. That was the purpose of the Law, or at least in Romans that's what Paul is emphasizing. To understand what

Paul is saying—he's saying that the Law is a mirror. Up until he looked into the mirror he thought he was fine. He thought he was good. He thought he was righteous. He thought he was good enough. But when he looked into the mirror, the mirror exposed him as a coveting person, and he realized, "I'm not good at all. I'm actually very bad." There's a lot of discussion as to why Paul picks that particular commandment, the tenth commandment, "Thou shalt not covet." There are different explanations given. I think the most logical is because the other commandments tend to be more obvious. I'm not murdering anyone. I'm not committing adultery. I'm not stealing anything. But I can easily hide a coveting heart. This is the internal stuff. This is the heart stuff. He could come off as being very good, very righteous. But when he looked in the mirror, he's really not. He's very selfish. A coveting heart is a heart driven by selfish ambition. It's about wanting everything for me: "I want your stuff. I want your relationship. I want your significance. I want your position. I want your power. I want..." Why do I want it? For me!—because of how it makes me feel, because of how it makes me look. So even though Paul's whole life was about self-righteousness and he thought he was pulling it off, when he looked in the mirror, he said, "Man, my heart is ugly! It's really selfish! I'm doing all of this for myself." And for the first time in his life he realized he was a coveting person. Verse 8:

> **But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead.**

That phrase **taking opportunity** comes from a Greek word that was a military term. It meant to set up a beachhead or outpost in enemy territory. So the army goes in, moves into enemy territory, takes a piece of ground, fortifies it, and out of that piece of ground, continues to attack the enemy. He personifies sin as if sin is a person, and sin has come up with a clever strategy to move into the Law, set up an outpost, in order to destroy him. How does this work? It works like this: He thought he was fine. He thought he was good enough. He thought he was righteous. And then he looks in the mirror, and what does sin do? Sin is standing right next to the tenth commandment and says, "You're not good; you're bad. You're really bad! Man, you are a loser. You are filled with sin and shame. You have no chance." And what Paul is saying is that once his identity that came through the mirror was that he was a coveter, it didn't make him covet less. Since that's his identity, he coveted more. He says it turned loose all kinds of coveting. If that's who I believe myself to be, then that's how I'm going to live, and so it actually increased, intensified his coveting. Verse 9:

> **I was once alive** *(living the dream)* **apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive, and I died;**

In other words, Paul had convinced himself he was righteous. He was good enough, until he looked in the mirror, and he realized, "I'm not good. I'm not good at all. I'm not even close to being good enough." At that moment the old Paul, that he thought was righteous, died, and sin became alive. And the more alive sin became, the more of a sinner he became, because that was his identity. It's interesting that the text says without the mirror he thought he was okay. I think that defines people in our culture.

I'm convinced this is why people embrace relativism. I don't think there's a person on the planet that, at the end of the day, thinks relativism is true, because nobody lives that way... nobody! It's just a convenient philosophical excuse to rationalize bad behavior, because what I can say is: "There is no standard". If there is no standard, I'm fine. I'm good enough. I don't need a mirror. As long as I assess myself on the basis of the standard that I myself have created, I'm fine. This is why people in the culture say you shouldn't judge anybody else—"Who are you to say to somebody

else that's right or wrong?"—because everybody is free to make up their own standard and then judge themselves by their own standard. My answer to the question would be, "It's not *my* standard. It's the standard of God; the standard reflects the eternal character of God." It'd be helpful for people in our culture to know, at the end of the day, when you stand before God, the standard of measurement is not the standard you have fabricated. It is the standard of the eternal character of God. That's the standard by which you are held accountable, and that's what Paul was saying. "When I looked in the mirror, suddenly I was exposed." This is why, whether you verbalize a standard as a Christian, or just live a standard—in your school, in the marketplace—it makes people mad. You may have thought that before, "I didn't say anything. I didn't do anything. Why are these people so upset?" It's because when you reflect a certain standard, it reflects on people's inability to keep that standard, and they don't like that. They don't like being exposed.

It all has to do with what standard by which I measure myself. Think of it this way: Let's imagine that I have convinced myself I am an awesome basketball player. Awesome, really! What's my standard of measure? Every day I go out on the driveway, and I go one-on-one with the neighbor kindergartener, and I'm telling you, day after day I dominate—slapping jump shots clear into the backyard. I'm awesome. (laughter) As long as that kindergartener is the standard, I am awesome. But as soon as the standard becomes the NBA, I'm not awesome. I'm not even average. I'm not even below average. I stink! It's just relative to the standard by which you measure your performance. That's what Paul is saying. He says:

> **but when the commandment came, *sin* became alive, and I died; and this commandment** *(Thou shalt not covet)* **which was to result in life,** (Vs. 9b-10a)

It's interesting he inserts that in there. It's just a "By the way…even though this was painful, it was the first step in my recognition that I needed a Savior. It was the very thing that would ultimately lead me to life."

> **...which was to result in life,** *(but the commandment)* **proved to result in death for me; for sin** *(here's our word)***, taking an opportunity** *(setting up an outpost)* **through the commandment, deceived me, and through it killed me.** (Vs. 10b-11)

Again, he's personifying sin as if sin is a person thinking strategically. And what he says is, "Sin lied to me." What does he mean by that? He means that sin came along and said, "You know, why don't you think about being your own god? Why don't you think about setting up your own standard? If you measure yourself by your own standard, you'll be good enough. Why don't you be in charge of your own significance and your own pleasure and your own happiness and your own life? If you do that, man, this is awesome! This is where life is found." And you tried that until, eventually, it all came crashing down. And then what happened? You look in the mirror, and when you look in the mirror, there's the commandment. But who is standing next to the commandment, but sin himself, and he's pointing to the commandment and he's saying, "You know, you are bad! You're a sinner. You're stinking up the joint. You're a loser. You deserve to be covered with shame and guilt. You are worthless. You'll never amount to anything." This is what he means when he says, "Sin deceived me." It fed me a lie, and then it sets up an outpost in the commandments and, when you show up, sin says, "You are a sinner; you are a loser. That's who you are; that's your identity. That's the way you'll always live." So he says, verse 12:

> **So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. 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.** (Vs. 12-13)

That gets a little confusing in there, but simply stated, this is what he's saying: Is the law bad? Absolutely not! It's good; it's righteous; it's holy. It's the mirror that reflects the character of God. The problem is not the mirror; the problem is sin. And when you look into the mirror, you see sin. It's not the mirror's fault; that's sin's fault. And it's through that, that sin is exposed. The Law was necessary in order that sin would become utterly sinful. Paul is saying that the Law is good; it's right; it's from God; it was necessary. You can't have lost people going around the world thinking, "Everything is fine. I'm good enough." They need a mirror in order that they might recognize they're not good; they're not measuring up. They need a Savior or they have no hope. But he's also saying the Law has never had the capacity to save you. The Law has never had the capacity to make you sin less. The Law has never had the capacity to set you free. That was never the purpose. Therefore, the Law simply can't do for you what only the Spirit of Jesus can do for you.

So the question might arise: Does that mean that now, under grace, I don't have standards; I don't have convictions; I don't have disciplines; I just do as I please? The answer would be: Absolutely not! I have disciplines; I have guidelines; I have principles that guide me through life. The difference is a difference of motive. If I believe at the core of my being I'm still bad—I have a ticket to Heaven, but at my core I'm still bad, and I'm still fighting that battle, and I really want to sin—then I'm going to have to put management around my life in order to keep me from spinning out of control. So I put these rules; I put these structures; I put these disciplines in my life in order to manage that wild animal that wants to be out of control. There's also a belief with the legalists that those rules, those guidelines, those disciplines, actually make me right. In other words, I'm *this right* because of my salvation, but as I perform better, I become *more right*, and I somehow make myself *more* in the eyes of God. And when I impose them on you, I'm doing that so you can be *more right* in the presence of God. The whole thinking is flawed. It causes you to look into the mirror and see a struggler, to see a failure, to see shame and guilt, to see someone who is enslaved to sin. And as long as that's what you see, and as long as that's your identity, I guarantee you, that's the way you're going to live. You've been engaged in a really bad marriage and you're not willing to let it go. There's no way that can produce freedom. Once you understand that what I have in Christ is not my wage—it's not what I deserve—it's a gift, but the gift is the very righteousness of God. I am clothed in the full righteousness of God. I can never be more righteous than I am today. I can't make myself more of anything, because I'm perfectly clothed in the eternal righteousness of God.

So why do I have disciplines? Why do I have guidelines and principles and rules that I live by? Is it because I believe ultimately I'm still out of control and I'm still a sinner, and I still want to do bad things? Absolutely not! I don't believe that. Is it because somehow by doing this I can make myself more right? Absolutely not! So why do you do it? The answer is this: Because now that I am married to Christ, under grace, I am a *new man* in Christ, and the passion of my heart is to do righteousness. I want to do the right thing. I want to find the freedom that He promises. I want to walk in obedience to Him. That's who I am. That's how I want to live my life. And so I put disciplines; I put guidelines; I put rules and structures in my life in order to create an environment where I'm most likely to succeed in the passions of my heart.

It's very much like the tracks for a train. Let me ask you a question: Do you think the railroad tracks for the train are restrictive or liberating? At first glance, you might think, "Well, they're restrictive. The poor train, he can't go sightseeing." Have you ever seen a train that tried to go sightseeing? The second that train is off the tracks, there is no freedom there. There is bondage. That train is not going anywhere, and you realize that the tracks are not bondage; they are not restrictive. They're what ultimately set the train free to go full speed ahead to the destination. Disciplines, rules, guidelines, principles that I have put in my life are there in order to create an environment where I am most likely to succeed in the righteous passions of my heart. I really do want to live that way, and I think this is the best way to get to that destination. If you, as a Christian, continue to struggle daily with sin and addiction and shame and guilt and how you define yourself, you may want to investigate the possibility that even though you're married to Christ, you're still having an affair with Adam. And until that stops, you have no hope for freedom.

You say, "How do I know? How do I measure that?" That's not complicated. You tell me: when you look in the mirror, what do you see? Do you see someone who is still defined by sin, by struggle, by shame, by guilt, by my past? "I'm a loser; I'll never get this"? If that's who you see in the mirror, I'll guarantee you, you're having an affair with Adam. But if you look in that mirror and you see the righteousness of Christ; you see a new creation in Christ; you see someone who has been set free under grace; you see someone who has a passion to live for that which is right—if you see yourself the way God sees you in Christ, then you are beginning to celebrate this magnificent marriage to Christ. It's only when you're willing to let the old marriage go that you're going to live in the freedom of this new marriage in Christ.

Father, we're thankful that You tell us the truth. Lord, I'm going to guess in this auditorium this morning there are quite a few that, with all sincerity, really want to experience the freedom of Christ. They want to be set free. They don't want to struggle every day. But the enemy is tricky and he's a deceiver and, even though they have become married to Christ, they have been deceived into having an affair with Adam. Lord, for those here this morning that still define themselves by their guilt, their shame, their struggles, their failures, just give them the wisdom to understand that's residue of a bad marriage, and help them to understand that's not who they are in this new marriage in Christ. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

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December 8/9, 2012

The Gospel Story: Remarried

A Study of Romans

Romans 7:1-13

Pastor Bryan Clark

Opening Discussion

1. Do you think legalism causes people to sin less or sin more? Why?

2. Are rules, convictions and disciplines always evidence of legalism? Why or why not?

3. Why do you think so many Christians still want to mix some "law" with their new life under grace?

Bible Study

1. Review what you learned in Romans 6. What were the main points?

2. What does Paul mean when he says "you are not under law but under grace" in Romans 6:14?

3. Read Romans 7:1-3. It's important to remember the illustration is just that, an illustration. It's not an allegory where all the parts of the illustration represent exactly the truth he's trying to communicate. In very simple terms, what is the point of the illustration of marriage?

4. Read Romans 7:4-6. First notice how the language corresponds to the illustration in verses 2, 3. What has to happen if we are to marry Christ (under grace)? Can you be married to both husbands at the same time? Why or why not?

5. What does Paul mean when he says, "the sinful passions which were aroused by the law?" How does the law (legalism) actually arouse sinful passions? If what defines you "in Adam" is you are operating as your own god, how are you likely to respond when you are told to do or not do something? Do you think legalism promotes righteousness or rebellion?

6. Romans 7:6 hints at what will be the discussion in Romans 8. For now it's good to at least file away this idea that what the letter of the law (legalism) could not do for us the Spirit of Christ does do for us.

7. Read Romans 7:7-13. Is the law bad or evil? How does "sin" use the law to create a beachhead in our lives to destroy us? Could this be why people in our culture today are so opposed to the Bible? What happens to someone who really thinks he or she is "good" but his or her goodness is shattered in the mirror of God's standard? Is that person likely to appreciate having that goodness illusion shattered?

8. What is necessary for sin to once again become sinful? Is the law at that point good or bad? According to this text, is the law then good or bad? Why?

Application

1. What does it look like to be married to both the law and grace? How does one go about assessing that in his or her own life? Do you have two husbands?

2. Rules, convictions and standards can either be a result of an attempt to make one righteous or because someone is righteous and wants to live that way. What's the difference? Which is it for you? How do you know that?

3. Which "husband" you focus on daily will define how you view yourself which will define then how you live. How do you view yourself on a daily basis? Do you see a struggling sinner defined by shame and guilt or do you see someone alive in God passionate for righteousness? According to Romans, which is the correct view?

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