

## WHY CHRISTIANS AREN'T UNDER OLD TESTAMENT LAW

Romans 7:1-6

02-01-09

### ALDERWOOD COMMUNITY CHURCH

**Romans 7:1-6** Do you not know, brothers-- for I am speaking to men who know the law-- that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives? <sup>2</sup> For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. <sup>3</sup> So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man. <sup>4</sup> So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, **that you might belong to another**, to him who was raised from the dead, **in order that we might bear fruit to God.** <sup>5</sup> For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, [sarx] the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death. <sup>6</sup> But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that **we serve in the new way of the Spirit**, and not in the old way of the written code.

#### **BIG IDEA: THE GENIUS OF CHRISTIAN MOTIVATION IS A COMPELLING RELATIONSHIP.**

##### EXEGESIS:

**Verse 4**, you also died to the law through the body of Christ

The instrument by which we died to the law.

That instrument is the physical body of Christ on the Cross.

**Verse 4**, that you might belong to another...

The religious leaders had developed a religious system with 613 laws. They chose the number 613 because that was how many separate letters were in the text containing the Ten Commandments. Then they found 613 commandments in the Pentateuch.... They divided this list into affirmative commands (do this) and negative commands (don't do this).

There were 248 affirmative commands, one for every part of the human body, as they understood it. There were 365 negative commands, one for each day of the year. They further divided the list into binding commands and nonbinding commands. Then they spent their days debating whether the divisions were accurate and ranking the commands within each division.

Enter Jesus. Jesus had the ability to take the complex and make it simple. A prime example is Matthew 22:37-40, where Jesus gives what has become known as the Great Commandment. Here is the scene. Jesus has just stumped the Sadducees. Literally. He silenced them by his wisdom (Mat. 22:34). Next up are the Pharisees. Maybe they can do a better job knocking this revolutionary down.

The Pharisees gather for a meeting. They devise a debate strategy. Their goal is to humiliate Jesus in front of the crowd. They choose their smartest guy, a lawyer, to take on Jesus. He asks Jesus which is the greatest commandment in the Law. Of all the 613 commandments, he is asking Jesus for the greatest. Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and most important commandment. The second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commandments."

Think about the significance of that moment. He said all the Law (and He added the Prophets) is summed up in this simple and perfect phrase. He was not lowering the standard of the Law. He was not abolishing it. He was capturing all its spirit, all of its essence, in one statement. He said all of it hangs on this. He summed up 613 commands in two. Jesus took complexity and the advancement of the Law and made it very simple.<sup>1</sup>

**Verse 5**, we were controlled by the sinful nature, [sarx]

**Moo:** Paul means, in effect, that the non-Christian is "enveloped in" and hence controlled by, narrowly human, this-worldly principles and values.

- Paul pictures sarx as another "power" of the old age, set in opposition to the Spirit...

<sup>1</sup> Thom Rainer, *Simple Church* (Hashville: Broadman and Holman, 2006), 16-17.

- Existence in the domain of the flesh is determined by the three other “powers” of the old age: *sin, the law, and death.*
  - **Verse 5:** the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death.

**Verse 6,** we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.

- **Moo:** [T]he antithesis is...between the Old Covenant and the New, the old age and the new.

#### INTRODUCTION:

- A. If you’ve seen Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade, you know that the Holy Grail was exceedingly well guarded. By the way, the Holy Grail is the name given the cup that Jesus used during the Last Supper with His disciples and supposedly given to Joseph of Arimathea. It was much sought after by medieval knights who believed the Holy Grail was associated special powers. The term, Holy Grail, is also used to mean any greatly desired or sought after object. This morning we are using the word in that sense. We’re talking about the Holy Grail of grace. God’s grace is much sought after: both by good-hearted spiritual pilgrims and by hostile spiritual predators. And it is associated with special powers: it is the power of God to salvation for all who believe.
  - If you possess it, it will take you to heaven. If you miss it, you will fall into hell.
  - If you possess it, you have the gift of abundant life from Jesus. If you miss it, you walk in spiritual darkness.
- B. This Holy Grail of grace needs protection. Just like anything that is terribly important, there is always somebody trying to mess with it. Grace gets messed with a lot. It suffers at the hands of its enemies and its friends.
- C. Mr. Johnson, in Garrison Keillor’s *Lake Wobegon Days*, preached a sermon against women’s slacks from Deuteronomy 22:5, *The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman’s garment: for all that do are an abomination unto the Lord thy God.* Garrison reflects...*My mother never wore slacks, though she did dress my sister in leggings, which troubled Grandpa. “It’s not the leggings so much as what they represent and what they could lead to,” he told her. He thoughts that baby boys should not wear sleepers unless they were the kind with snaps up the elgs. Mother pointed out that the infant Jesus was wrapped up in swaddling clothes. “That doesn’t mean he wore a dress,” Grandpa said. “They probably wrapped his legs separately.* (page 132)
- D. This tongue-in-cheek story illustrates what we call legalism: it’s not a word you’ll find in your Bible, although the problem of legalism is well documented in God’s Word. Legalism is the archenemy of grace – it is the imposition of non-biblical demands on people as a condition of salvation or a condition of spirituality. In other words, legalism is human rules to gain God’s approval.
- E. The Apostle Paul fought to protect grace in every city where he preached. He fought for it in Turkey and he fought for it in Rome. The legalists were hot on his trail everywhere he went in the Mediterranean world and sometimes they got to town before he did. Till the day a Roman sword cut off his head, he never gave up protecting the Holy Grail of grace.
- F. Now the mantle falls upon our shoulders. How do we carry on the quest? What is there for us to do in protecting the message of grace?

#### **TRANSITION: THIS COMPELLING RELATIONSHIP—THREE BIG THOUGHTS...**

- I. **IT’S WORTH FIGHTING FOR** (Acts 15:2, *This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them.*)

- A. Why?
  1. Because of the hounds of legalism. The church at Antioch was doing famously
    - Flash back to Acts 11:19 for the story:
 

*19 Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. 20 Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling*

them the good news about the Lord Jesus. 21 The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. 22 News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. 23 When he arrived and saw the evidence of the **grace** of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. 24 He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. 25 Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, 26 and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

- ❑ Now back to **Acts 15:1**. Sure enough, anywhere God's grace is sprouting and flowering, expect the legalists to show up with their toxic spiritual herbicides. *Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved."* Their fuller message is revealed in verse 5, *"The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses."*

2. What they do.

- ❑ First, they mess up salvation. They make salvation something that you have to earn by the good things you do.
- ❑ Second, they mess up Christian living. They make living for Jesus something you have to do rather than something you want to do. They reduce a vital, loving relationship with Jesus to a lifeless list of do's and don'ts.
  - ❑ **Dr. Homer Hammontree** used to say that there is a city that has two million inhabitants, none of who drinks, smokes, dances, or plays cards. But not one of them has a bit of spiritual life. He was referring, of course, to the Greenwood Hills Cemetery in New York City.<sup>2</sup>
  - ❑ Legalism is doing the **right thing** for the **wrong reason**.

Let's take these one at a time.

- ❑ What legalists do to salvation. The New Testament is crystal clear on how sinners get saved.
  - Point One: it's a gift. Ephesians 2:8, *For it is by **grace** you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- 9 not by works, so that no one can boast.*
  - Point Two: it's by a sacrifice. II Corinthians 5:21, *God made him who had no sin to be **sin for us**, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*
  - Point Three: it's through faith. John 3:16, *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

But the legalists say, *Not so fast. It's a little more complicated than that. You can't just believe. There are some criteria you have to meet first.* In Bible times it was the Law of Moses:

- ❑ No work or cooking or long walks on the Sabbath
- ❑ Animal sacrifices
- ❑ Rituals of ceremonial cleansing
- ❑ Circumcision
- ❑ Taboo foods
- ❑ Forbidden clothing fiber blends

Today legalists have different things on the list:

- ❑ Charitable giving

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<sup>2</sup> J. Dwighr Pentecost, "Who's Right?" *Kindred Spirit* (Autumn, 1987), 14.

- ❑ Regular attendance at church or mass
    - ❑ Confession
    - ❑ Door-to-door witnessing for Jehovah
    - ❑ Volunteerism
    - ❑ Or simply being a really good person, better than most.  
You know, *I've lived a pretty good life. If anybody gets to heaven, I'm sure I will!*
  - ❑ What legalists do to Christian living. They say...*OK, we'll grant you that you can't get to heaven by doing good works. You just have faith in Jesus. BUT, if you don't keep this list of rules, you will lose your salvation. If you don't keep this list, you won't be a good Christian!*
    - ❑ *DATE: September 8, 1990*  
*PLACE: The Sunday Comics*  
*Garfield, leaping, Rambo-like, through the open door of a pet shop, announces himself: FREEDOM FIGHTER!*  
*He charges through the shop, flinging open the cages of the confined pets, proclaiming: YOU'RE FREE! YOU'RE FREE!*  
*But, instead of rejoicing in this sudden gift of liberation, the cats and dogs and birds all remain in their open cages, intimidated by the unknown possibilities that come with freedom.*  
*Seeing this, Garfield surmises: HMMM, FOLKS MUST NOT BE HEAVILY INTO FREEDOM THESE DAYS.*  
*Ever flexible, he whirls back through the pet shop, slamming cage doors and cheering: YOU'RE SECURE! YOU'RE SECURE!*  
*The pets, reconfined, look relieved.*<sup>3</sup>
  - Paul confronted the Galatians on this. He called them foolish in Galatians 3:1. Their foolishness was that they believed in Jesus for their salvation, but believed in themselves for their sanctification. They believed that Jesus got you to heaven but good works got you holiness. **Verse 3**, *Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?*
3. Why it's so bad
- ❑ Legalism fools sinners into Hell. How tragic to think that there are people who have worked so hard to get to heaven who won't get there. Matthew 7:21, *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' 23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"*
  - ❑ Legalism robs saints of the joy of truly loving Jesus Christ.
    - A husband comes to me and says, *Pastor, something's missing in my marriage. We're drifting further and further apart. There's no affection. We're irritable with each other. More and more it's just like we're living separate lives. We sort of just live in the same house. What can I do?*  
ANSWER: Take this list home and do exactly and everything it says:
      - ❑ Take at least one shower every day.
      - ❑ Tote the trash out every Friday morning before 7 a.m.
      - ❑ Go to church 3 out of 4 Sundays.
      - ❑ Buy her flowers weekly.
      - ❑ Don't yell at her or hit her.
      - ❑ Mow the lawn.

<sup>3</sup> Gordon McKenzie, *Orbiting the Giant Hairball* (NY: Viking Penguin, 1996), 101.

- ❑ Put your dirty clothes in the hamper.
- ❑ Spend time every day with the kids.
- ❑ Make sure the gas tank's full.

What's wrong with that counsel? **Nothing and everything.** It's all good stuff. It's all stuff any loving husband should do. But it's missing something.

Try this...

**Legalism says...**to be a good Christian you have to keep the list. The stuff is the main thing.

**Grace says...**to be a good Christian you need to love Jesus with all your heart. The relationship is the main thing. The stuff follows naturally. Christian...do you love Him?!

B. How?

1. Meet legalism head-on

- ❑ **Galatians 1:6**, *I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel-- 7 which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!*
- ❑ **Galatians 2:11**, *When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong.*

2. Have your arguments ready

- ❑ Legalism can't save. **Acts 15:10**, *Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? 11 No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."*
- ❑ Legalism can't make you a good Christian. **Colossians 2:23**, *Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their **harsh treatment** of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.*

II. **IT'S WORTH SELF-CONTROL** (**Acts 15:28**, *It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following...*)

A. To Bring Benefit Others

1. This chapter reminds us that Christians are free from the Old Testament Law. They could eat whatever food they wanted. They could do whatever they wanted on the Sabbath. They could circumcise or not circumcise. Whatever. But "can" doesn't always mean "should." There are some other values at work here. The Council of Jerusalem has come down hard on the grace side for salvation. But on the grace side for Christian living, they have a few comments. They're all for grace-living, but there are some cautions. Here they are in Verses 28-29, *It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: 29 You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things.*
2. The value of peace. See Verse 21, *For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath."* The Antiochian church was a strong mix of Jewish and Gentile believers. There were some Gentile behaviors that were so offensive to Jews, even Christian Jews, that it would be like fingernails on a chalkboard relationally in the church. Every Jew had been trained to stay away from idol meat, bloody meat and strangled meat. Even today, if I had lunch with a Hebrew Christian friend, I wouldn't order a ham sandwich unless I knew how he felt about it.

Today, the sensitivity among believers isn't about meat things; it's about things like alcohol, tobacco, entertainment choices, body piercings and music styles.

□ **Romans 12:18**, *If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*

□ **Romans 14:19**, *Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.*

3. The value of edification (building others up)

□ **Romans 14:20**, *Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. 21 It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall.*

□ **Cf. I Corinthians 8:9-13**

4. Notice: This is a judgment call based on local issues of sensitivity. It's an important judgment call. It was made by the godliest leaders the church possessed, and they were leaders who were sold out to grace. Note also that it was more than a human judgment call, good as it was. It also packed the heat of the Holy Spirit: Verse 28. But we also need to realize that these are not timeless truths for the church. We don't even have idol meat in America. But there are timeless principles here about keeping peace in the body of believers and making sure that my freedom doesn't rip the heart out of a younger believers conscience.

5. Imagine the Apostle Paul interviewing a young Christian man applying to become a member of the St. Paul Evangelistic organization.

Paul: *My, my, Theodoris, your resume is quite impressive. And I see we have high recommendations about you from Peter and James.*

Theodoris: *Well, they are very kind.*

Paul: *Tell me, young Theodoris, how do you feel about eating meat that was offered to an idol?*

Theodoris: *I'm glad you asked that question, Mr. Paul. I've really wrestled with this subject and I even wrote a paper about it at Jerusalem Bible Seminary. And I have concluded that meat is just plain old meat. It doesn't matter where it's been. Besides, idols are nothing: just wood and stone and metal. I really believe that as a mature, grace Christian, I have complete liberty before God to eat that meat. I can do it with a perfectly clear conscience before God.*

Paul: *Fine answer, Theodoris and I agree with you completely. Now let me ask you this. Next week we're sailing for Rome, and as you know, the church there is full of very young Christians who have been saved out of idolatry. Most of them wouldn't idol meat with a ten foot pole. If we eat that meat in Rome, we are going to risk making some of those young believers sin against their conscience by following our example. So if you join our organization, I must insist that you abstain from idol meat whenever I say so. Is that clear?*

Theodoris: *Paul, you amaze me! Aren't you being rather legalistic about this? You're messing with my Christian liberty! You, of all people, the great defender of grace! Shame on you!*

Paul: *Young Theodoris, listen to me and listen well. [I'm not making the rest of this up. Look at verse 14.] (vv. 14-15) "As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. 15 If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died." (vv. 20-21) "Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. 21 It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall."*

6. The Christian is not without some form of law:
- **Galatians 6:2** *Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.*
  - **1 Corinthians 7:19** *Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts.*
  - **1 Corinthians 9:20-22** *To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. <sup>21</sup> To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. <sup>22</sup> To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.*

B. To Protect Myself

1. Sometimes we confuse grace-living with sinful-living.

I believe that's why sex is listed in this passage. It stands in an entirely different category than the Jewish food prohibitions. Why is it here? It seems like a no-brainer. Why did the Jerusalem Council have to point out to the Gentile Christians that they needed to abstain from sexual immorality? I believe it is because the Gentile society was so pagan that they no longer thought of sexual immorality as immorality. They had lost all moral conscience about sex. It was just another physical appetite to satisfy, like taking a drink when you're thirsty.

That really shouldn't be so hard for us to understand. Have you noticed how many Christians are getting divorces that lack biblical warrant? Have you noticed how many Christian young adults are moving in with their boyfriends and girlfriends as if it was a non-issue?

- **Jude 1:4**, *For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the **grace** of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.*
  - **Galatians 5:13**, *You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.*
  - **Titus 2:11**, *For the **grace** of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. <sup>12</sup> It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,*
2. Sometimes we translate grace into addiction or distraction. **1 Corinthians 6:12**, *"Everything is permissible for me"-- but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible for me"-- but I will not be mastered by anything.*
3. Chuck Swindoll asks and answers a probing question: *Why is grace risky? Because it has fewer boundaries than a legalistic system. And to live grace to the extreme means that some will take advantage of it. Some refer to grace as though it is the God-given pervasive covering for their outright disobedience which they call amazing grace. I call it abusing grace.*
4. **MacKenzie** imagines a guy taking up skydiving. The first first jumps are absolutely exhilarating, but after seven months of jumping, the thrill is gone. In mid-air I find myself thinking: *"I wonder what's for dinner."*
- Wait a minute! What happened to the excitement? Where did the life-expanding thrill of my first jump go?*
- Nothing lasts.*
- Nothing.*
- I refuse to accept the loss. I've got to recreate the mind-blowing intoxication of my earlier jumps. But how?*
- A little voice inside me whispers: "Unbuckle your parachute."*
- I'm so impatient to get the old excitement back that I seize upon this idea without really thinking it through. Fighting the wind, I reach down withy*



- It can't sanctify
  - It can't forgive
  -
2. Grace enables
- **2 Timothy 2:1**, *You then, my son, be **strong in** the grace that is in Christ Jesus.*
  - **Hebrews 13:9**, *Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by **grace**, not by ceremonial foods, which are of no value to those who eat them.*
  - **II Thessalonians 2:16**, *May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his **grace** gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, 17 encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.*
  - **Colossians 1:5**, *the gospel 6 that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's **grace** in all its truth.*
  - I used to think that the way to raise good Christian kids was to lay down the law.
    - Take them to church and Sunday School
    - Expect instant obedience to every command
    - Lay out clear and consistent expectations and predictable consequences
    - Keep the bar high
    - Keep raising the bar
    - You know what I learned? I learned that I was missing something. I was missing grace. I learned that you don't raise good kids or a good lawn with just weed killer. You need good fertilizer, too.
    - God raises good Christians just like we raise good Christian kids. With lots of grace.

CONCLUSION:

- A. The Jewish leaders *believed, for example, that it was all right to swallow vinegar on the Sabbath but not to gargle it—gargling was considered labor. One Pharisaical teaching held that it was permissible to eat an egg that had been laid on the Sabbath only if the chicken was killed the next day for having violated the Sabbath.*<sup>6</sup>
- B. **Augustine:** *Love God and do as you please.*
- C. **Curtis Mitchell:** *It is impossible to love God and not have do's and don'ts. However, it is possible to have do's and don'ts and not really love him. That's legalism.*<sup>7</sup>

--TIMOTHY G. WALTON

<sup>6</sup> John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan/Academie Books, 1988), 40.

<sup>7</sup> Curtis Mitchell, "The Key to Christian Living," *Moody* (February 1987), 81.