

## The Relation of the Believer to the Law in Romans 7

1. In Romans 7:2f the apostle is anxious to show the enslavement of individuals to the Law. In order to personify his point of concern, Paul appropriates the concept of a marriage covenant and death to illustrate the Mosaic Law and death with Christ and what the practical effect would be.
2. The apostle begins his argument by pointing out that the Law controls a person as long as that individual is alive. For example, according to the Law, a married woman is bound to her living husband. However, if her husband were dead, she would be free from the Law and could be remarried without any social penalty.
3. Now, if a woman did become the wife of another man [without a valid divorce and apart from his dying] she would be called an adulteress. Of course, if her husband died, she would be free from this regulation of the Law and would not be an adulteress if she became the wife of another man.
4. Paul's spiritual point becomes clear. The Jewish Christians were "married" to their husband—the Law. They had promised to honor and obey the Law. Then came Christ. The heart of the Christian longs to be with Him. But what about this relationship to the Law? Something must happen to the Law in order to free the Christian to be related to another in an intimate way. But the Law will not die! It cannot die! What is to be done? The suggestion comes that the Christian die! In the act of dying comes spiritual freedom to be "married" to Another, even Jesus Christ the Lord.
5. The religious imagery and spiritual suggestion is not as outlandish as it might seem because, in the sight of God, by virtue of the death of Christ at Calvary, the Christian has *already* died a spiritual death. By faith, the Christian unites himself with the experience of Christ on the Cross so that the Old Man dies. Now there is freedom from the Old Covenant. Now there is new life by virtue of the resurrection with the freedom to unite with the Lord according to the terms of the New Covenant.
6. By using a familiar marital relationship, Paul was able to illustrate in a vivid way that bondage to the Old Covenant (the Old Husband) is broken through death thereby providing a legal way spiritually to be united to Christ.
7. The fact that Paul speaks of marriage ending by a death, does not negate the fact that a marriage can end in some other manner, such as divorce. It just means that in this illustration the Christian (personified by the woman) has no legal grounds to demand a divorce from her husband (the Law) because the Law keeps the marital obligations to the letter. The only hope of a divorce [or permanent separation] with freedom to be with Another lies in the marriage ending by death.
8. Of course, in the real world, not all husbands fulfill their marital obligations and so marriages end by divorce as well as by death.

9. It is important to keep in mind while studying Romans 7 that the issue of divorce is not taught. Divorce is neither considered nor condemned. Paul's only desire is to illustrate the relationship of the believer with the Old and New Covenant. He is not teaching on the topic of divorce and re-marriage. Therefore, according to the rules of interpretation, a passage should not be taken out of context to teach something it was not meant to teach.

### Special Note

10. There was a usual Jewish Form of a Divorce Decree.

*On the-- day of the week— in the month— in the year— from the beginning of the world, according to the common computation in the province of— I— the son of— by whatever name I may be known, of the town of—with entire consent of mind, and without any constraint, have divorced, dismissed and expelled thee—daughter of—by whatever name thou art called, of the town who has been my wife hitherto; But now I have dismissed thee— the daughter of—by whatever name thou art called, of the town of— so as to be free at thy own disposal, to marry whomsoever thou pleasest, without hindrance from anyone, from this day for ever. Thou art therefore free for anyone who would marry thee. Let this be thy bill of divorce from me, a writing of separation and expulsion, according to the Law of Moses and Israel.*

\_\_\_\_\_, The son of \_\_\_\_\_, witness

\_\_\_\_\_, The son of \_\_\_\_\_, witness

11. The End of a Marriage and 1 Corinthians 7:39.

- In conjunction with Romans 7:2f, 1 Corinthians 7:39 is often used to teach that marriage can only end by death.
- It is true that Paul teaches that *a woman is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth*. The point is uncontested. However, Paul does not say that marriage can *only* end by the death of a spouse. That is reading too much into the passage all the while neglecting other Scripture which teaches on the subject of divorce and remarriage.
- In context, Paul is simply addressing those individuals who are free to marry as a result of the death of their spouse. He has already addressed other marital situations in the chapter.
- Actually, while addressing those who are widowed and so have the right to remarry because their husbands are dead, Paul quotes the standard divorce certificate (*Mishnah Gittin 9.3*) in order to show that the widow has the same freedom as a divorced woman. *She is at liberty to be married to whom she will*. The only addition is that the Christian widow must marry a Christian man.