**NOW WE BELONG TO JESUS**

***Romans 7:1-25***

***“So, my brothers and sisters, 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 for God.” (v. 4)***

Romans 6-8 deal with believers’ sanctification. Sanctification is our spiritual growth in likeness to Christ in our actual lives. For our spiritual growth, Apostle Paul first helps each of his readers to have a clear identity in Christ. In chapter 6, we learned that we already died to sin but are alive to God in Christ Jesus through his death and resurrection. We need to continually remind ourselves that our old self has gone; we are now new creations in Christ (2Co 5:17). As new creations, we need to offer ourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness (Ro 5:19b). In today’s passage, Paul teaches that we died to the law and belong to Jesus. Let’s think about what this means to us. Based on this teaching, let’s learn the secret of spiritual growth and victory that leads us to Jesus’ glorious image!

1. **Released from the law; belonging to Christ (vs. 1-13)**

Look at verse 1. ***“Do you not know, brothers and sisters—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law has authority over someone only as long as that person lives?”*** Paul was speaking to Christians in Rome, many of whom came from Jewish backgrounds and were familiar with the law. What is the law? In a narrower sense, the law refers to the five books of Moses. In a broader sense, however, the law is God’s absolute moral standard for human beings revealed in the Bible. The Ten Commandments declare the most basic principles of God’s moral law. The law teaches people what is evil and works to restrain evil. Also, the law teaches us what is good and blesses us to live godly lives. Before entering the Promised Land, Moses reminded the Israelites of the law and said, *“Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you—they are your life…” (Dt 32:46-47)* Keeping God’s law is a matter of life or death and blessing or curse for anyone. But Paul’s point is that the law has authority over someone only as long as that person lives. It is true that the law applies to a living man, not to a dead man. Even the most committed cop does not give a ticket to a funeral car.

Paul explains his point with an illustration from marriage. Marriage requires a lifetime commitment between a husband and wife. No matter how long and difficult, the law of marriage is binding till the death of one of the parties (2-3). So in our marriage vows, the groom says, “I, --, take you, -- to be my wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part, according to God's holy law, in the presence of God I make this vow.” And the bride makes the same promise.

Actually, until any person is saved, he or she has been married to the law, for all men are held accountable to the law of God. So we can say that at one time each of us was Mrs. Law. Mrs. Law worked hard to serve Mr. Law. She cooked three meals a day, did his laundry, and cleaned their house. But Mr. Law was never satisfied nor happy with her. Rather, he pointed out Mrs. Law’s faults like some burnt food, a jam-packed garbage can, or lost socks in the laundry room. Furthermore, he made ever-increasing demands on her every day. Mr. Law condemned her until she became helpless and full of self-condemnation to the point of death. This depicts the situation of all people under God’s law.

The only way to be released from this sad marriage life is through the death of one of the parties. But Mr. Law’s health is perfect like Superman. He has never contracted any disease and his vital signs are completely normal, without any signs of weakness. If Mr. Law cannot die, Mrs. Law must die. How? Look at verse 4. ***“So, my brothers and sisters, 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 for God.”*** Here Paul points out that we Christians died to the law through the death of Jesus Christ and now belong to the Risen Christ. What does this mean to us?

First, we are freed from the curse of the law. The law is from God. The law is holy, righteous, good, and spiritual as the Law Maker, our Creator God, is righteous (12-13). The law was given for the good of mankind because it makes the observers good, holy, and blessed. Due to our sin, however, we became totally corrupted from head to toe and lost the ability to keep the law. From our hearts and with our actions we violated the law. The blessed law brought us God’s curse. Ga 3:10b says, *“…Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.”* We were cursed under the condemnation of the law and the entire world was under God’s wrath. Wherever we were and whatever we did, we were under God’s curse. The ultimate curse was death, the eternal punishment in hell. But Christ paid the full price for our sin, and fulfilled the requirement of the law for us through his death on the cross. So Ga 3:13 also says, *“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.’”* When we believe in Jesus, who became a curse for us on the cross, God regards that our old self under the curse of the law died with Christ’s death, and our new self is made alive with Jesus’ resurrection. Therefore, we must believe that in Christ we are absolutely free from the demands of the law and the penalty of sin. Praise the Lord, who became a curse for us, so that we may be freed from the condemnation of the law!

Second, we became the bride of Christ. God’s purpose of saving us from sin and the law is to make us the bride of Christ (2 Co 11:2). To pay a dowry, Jesus fully gave himself up for us with his own blood. Now we become Christ’s. So we have become Mrs. Grace. Unlike Mr. Law, our Lord Mr. Grace dearly loves us and rejoices over us (Isa 62:5), embracing all our weaknesses. Though we lost our keys one after another, first the house key, then the garage key, the car key, and the safe deposit box key, Mr. Grace did not get upset. He said, “Honey, it is okay. I made another one for you. Here it is.” Though we burned dinner again, he said, “Honey, it is okay. I really appreciate your heart for me.” Though we bounced seven checks in a week and accumulated many bank charges, he said, “Honey, it is okay. I covered everything. Here is some pocket money for you.” Mr. Grace is always forgiving, tender, kind, affectionate and sacrificial. He always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres (1Co 13:7). In spite of our many shortcomings, our Lord Jesus never fails to honor us as princes and princesses of his glorious kingdom. He promises that he will never leave us nor forsake us (Heb 13:5b). His faithfulness in the married relationship with us never changes (Heb 13:8).

A married relationship involves exclusive commitment of heart, mind, and body between a husband and wife. In the same way, a Christian must make a commitment of their heart, mind and body to Christ for a joyful and fruitful Christian life. Many Christians like Jesus’ love and grace, but they do not want to make a commitment to live as a bride of Christ. Just as a man or a woman with no commitment to his or her spouse cannot feel love and security, people with no commitment to Christ are unstable and unfruitful like withered branches. We must make a life commitment to our Lord. A life commitment means to love him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength (Dt 6:5; Mt 22:37). It means to trust in him and obey his words, love our neighbors as ourselves (Jn 14:15; 1Jn 2:5) and serve his mission. When we are called to belong to and follow Christ, we are summoned to an exclusive attachment to his person (Lk 9:57-62). Our bondage with Christ should be the strongest, more than any bond on earth. Paradoxically, when we are bound to Jesus Christ alone, we are freed from all earthly ties.

Through such a faithful relationship with Christ, God has a clear goal in our lives. Look at verse 4 again. ***“So, my brothers and sisters, 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 for God.”*** God wants to make our lives truly fruitful for his glory. The goal of each Christian life on earth is conformity to the moral image of God as exactly manifested in his Incarnate Son, Jesus Christ. This is our sanctification through deep unity with Christ. Jesus says in John 15:5, *“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”* Christ is now at work purifying and beautifying his bride by his Spirit and by his word for himself and for our joy. Then our sanctified life will produce good works. Our Lord now adorns us with beautiful jewels, which are his characteristics, the fruit of Holy Spirit: Love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Ga 5:22-33). When our bridegroom Jesus comes again, he wants to see each of us fully ready to welcome him as a pure bride beautifully adorned with these precious jewels.

Third, serving in the new way of the Spirit. Look at verse 6. ***“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.”*** Once Apostle Paul understood keeping God’s law as a condition of salvation. But now he realized that the law reveals his sinfulness. As an elite Jew, Paul trained himself to keep all the outward regulations of the law. However, when the 10th Commandment, *“You shall not covet”* penetrated his heart, all his dirty sins were revealed. He must have coveted positions of honor, academic achievements, someone’s donkey, someone’s wife, and so on. Now he truly came to know what the law meant to him. Look at verse 13. ***“Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! Nevertheless, in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it used what is good to bring about my death, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.”*** The law is a mirror that reveals our inner man and shows sin to be utterly sinful. In doing so, the law is like a schoolmaster or tutor who ultimately leads us to Christ (Ga 3:24).

Now that Paul realized that he could attain his salvation not by keeping the law, but by God’s grace through Jesus, his attitude toward the law was changed. He wanted to keep the law not as a means of salvation but as a way to have personal fellowship with Christ and become more and more like him. His motive to obey the law was no longer based on duty or fear but based on his love for his bridegroom who redeemed him and gave himself for him. Most of all, he now understood that the source of new life is the Holy Spirit. So far, he had tried to obey the word of God by his own will power, but now the Spirit became the main power source for his spiritual life. Like Apostle Paul, fully entrusting our lives unto the guidance of the Spirit, we can serve our Lord in the new way of the Spirit with freedom and joy. Thank God for his marvelous grace for us by saving us from the curse of the law, making us Jesus’ lovely bride, and enabling us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days (Lk 1:74-75).

1. **Victory in Jesus (vs. 14-25)**

Paul, now as a bride of Christ, wanted to please his bridegroom Jesus all the more. He thought all his problems were solved and that he was now able to serve the Lord without hindrance. But some strange thing occurred. Look at verses 14-15. ***“We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.”*** Paul wanted to do what is good according to God’s law, but he continued to do what he hated to do. In the course of struggling with sin, Paul found his sinful nature still living in his body and two powers at work in him. His description of his condition is very vivid: His inner being or new self is eager to do good, but evil is right there with him like a crouching animal ready to pounce on him (21). In his inner being he delights in God’s law, but the power of sin at work in his body is waging war against his new self and making him a prisoner of the law of sin (22-23). In this spiritual battle, he tasted defeat and cried in anguish for help, ***“What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?” (24)***This is the condition we are all in. When we try to keep the law, we fail because the sinful nature within us is more powerful than we are. We can only confess our spiritual misery. But we should not stop here.

What did Paul do? Look at verse 25. ***“Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.”*** Paul deeply despaired over himself and came to Jesus. Paul’s inner struggle finally helped him to totally commit himself to Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord. Through the struggle, he sincerely admitted that he was a wretched sinner who needed the grace of God. And God had already answered his cry for help. Jesus, the Lamb of God, was faithful and just and washed away all his sins with his precious blood. Then Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit upon him. The Holy Spirit enabled Paul to overcome his wretched self and serve God with new strength. So he thanks God and confesses his love for Jesus. Paul teaches us how to fight our spiritual battle and live victorious lives.

I believe that all of us may experience such spiritual struggle between our new self and our sinful nature. Some may want to be faithful to prayers, regular Bible reading, worship or reflection writing. Some may want to use time wisely for God by stopping bad habits like excessive internet surfing or playing games. Some may be struggling to live a holy and loving life against lust, anger, hatred, pride or jealousy. This spiritual struggle is necessary because it is the evidence that we are spiritually alive like a fish swimming against a stream. Hebrews 12:4 encourages us in our struggle against sin to resist even to the point of shedding our blood. If there is no spiritual struggle in our life, it is a very dangerous sign like a dead fish.

How can we win the victory in our spiritual battle? We must not look to ourselves. We must look to Jesus by faith. In Jesus, there is the forgiveness of sins, the righteousness of God, and a victorious life through the Holy Spirit. Jesus has risen and he is powerful and glorious. The power of Jesus’ blood is still effective to anyone who comes to him in faith. Jesus is everything to everybody. Let’s come to Jesus in our spiritual struggle by humbly confessing our utter helplessness and seeking his help, saying, ***“What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?”*** Let’s confess our faith in Christ, ***“Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!”*** May God continually strengthen us to grow as Jesus’ holy bride until we meet our Lord face to face!