

Is the gospel for good people...or for wretches?

I. Who is your husband?

"You are either married to the law or married to Christ, but you cannot be unmarried." (Keller)

A. Married to the law

"The law is binding on a person only as long as he lives. A married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage." (vv.1-2)

1. Being bound to the law means bondage to sin

The law as a system of salvation keeps us under the dominion of sin because we are unable to obey its requirements. *"It reveals sin, not salvation, and brings wrath, not grace."(Stott, 190)*

2. It's a Loveless, dysfunctional marriage

Marriage to the law means having a taskmaster for a husband – if you can't perform his demands perfectly and perpetually, you face rejection. The incentive to please and find acceptance is based on fear.

3. Fruit of the marriage

The law arouses our sinful passions to *"bear fruit for death."* (v.5) When we're controlled by sinful desires, we are in effect rendering service to death as our master.

4. Until death do us part

The law has authority over you only as long as you live. *"As long as law governs us there is no possibility of release from the bondage of sin. The only alternative is discharge from the law." (Murray, 243)*

B. Released through another kind of death

"You also have died to the law through the body of Christ." (v. 4)

1. Through the body of Christ

Jesus came in a body to live *"under the jurisdiction of the law that He might redeem those under its authority."* (Gal 4:4) He lived to fulfill the law's requirements perfectly; He died to break the bonds of our marriage to the law.

2. Jesus' death is your death:

"When you trusted in Jesus and what He did by allowing His body to be nailed to the cross, you were united to Christ - His life experience became your life experience and His death became your death. His death put to death the power of the law and the penalty of the law and it is gone!" (TCH)

3. Frees you to remarry

"If her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. Accordingly she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress." (v. 3)

4. Complete release

"The strong verb for release (katargeo) can mean to annul or destroy...the woman's status as a wife has been abolished, completely done away. She is no longer a wife." (Stott, 193)

5. Legitimate release

Your marriage to the law was broken by death. Therefore, remarriage is morally legitimate. The law cannot condemn you or accuse you of adultery. *"In fact, it would be adultery to go back to the law (your former husband) as the means of salvation." (TCH)*

C. Married to Christ

*"So that you may be **joined** to another, to Him who has been raised from the dead." (v. 4)*

1. Intimate and indissoluble

Scandalous language - usually the word 'joined' is used to communicate intimacy in marriage. Our union with Christ is permanent because it is eternal. *"Christ being raised from the dead dies no more." (6:9) and this immortality seals the indissolubility of this marital bond." (Murray, 243)*

2. You are valued, loved and accepted

Jesus is the bridegroom who pursues you, *"allures you...and betroths you to Him forever, in righteousness, loving-kindness and compassion." (Hosea 2:14, 19, 20)*

3. It's a comprehensive, radical relationship of love

"What an incredible metaphor – we are married to Christ! To be Christian is to fall in love with Jesus and to enter into a legal, yet personal, relationship as comprehensive as marriage. When you get married, no part of your life goes unaffected. So though Christians are now not 'under law,' they have every aspect of their lives changed by the coming of Jesus Christ." (Keller, 156)

4. Our response is love

Act like who you are –loved, valued and accepted in Christ. *"In a good marriage, your whole life is affected and changed by the wishes and desires of the person you love. You get pleasure from giving pleasure. You seek to discover the wishes of your beloved and are happy to make changes in accord with those wishes." (Keller, 157)*

5. It produces fruit for God in service

"Union with Christ in his death must never be severed from union with Him in his resurrection. The end of this union is that we may bring forth fruit to God." (Murray, 244) "The result of being joined to Christ is holy living, 'in the new way of the Spirit.' Why do we serve? Not because the law is our master and we have to, but because Christ is our husband and we want to." (Stott)

II. Warfare with sin

"What shall we say: That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.'" (v. 7)

A. The purpose of the Law

1. It defines sin

Without the standard of the law we wouldn't know what sin is.

2. It reveals sin in us

“Apart from the law, sin is dead.” (v. 8) The law comes and stirs up sin within us. We recognize how bad sin really is – it’s not just rule breaking, it’s living in a way that distances us from God.

3. It breaks us

It convicts us and brings us to the end of ourselves, putting to death any hope that we can measure up to demands of law. It makes us look to Christ as the only source of rescue.

B. The essence of sin

“But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died.”(v.8, 9)

1. Motive of sin – playing God

“Since the essence of sin is the desire to play God – to live as we wish, with no infringements on our sovereignty-every law will stir up sin in its original force and power. The more we’re exposed to the law of God, the more that sinful force will be aggravated into reaction.” (Keller, 164)

2. External acts or internal attitudes?

If sin just about our external behavior, we can fool ourselves into thinking (like Paul) that we are doing pretty well– until we grasp what the law really requires- that’s when it comes home to us.

3. Coveting – the command that reveals the inward heart

“To covet is to be discontent with what God has given you. It includes envy, self-pity, grumbling, and murmuring. Coveting is not simply ‘wanting,’ it an idolatrous longing for more beauty, wealth, approval and popularity than you have. It is not wrong to want such things, but if you are bitter when you don’t achieve them, it is because your desire for them has become idolatrous coveting.” (Keller, 166)

C. The enemy within

“For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.” (vv.14-17)

1. Does this refer to the struggle of a believer or an unbeliever?

We are *“compelled to believe this is Paul’s experience in a state of grace.” (Murray, 259)*

For the following reasons:

He switches to a present emphatic verb tense

The preceding verses are in the past tense, but beginning with verse 14, Paul speaks in the present tense. It’s his now.

He “delights in God’s Law” (v. 22)

Unbelievers wouldn’t love God’s law. *“The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law nor can it do so.” (Rom 8:7)*

He knows he is lost

“I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.” Unbelievers do not know that they are lost, are unaware of their sinfulness, and do not care.

2. Two wrong responses

Self-righteous moralism

Confident self esteem - when we think we are measure up to the law, it produces pride and a judgmental attitude towards those who haven’t ‘attained our level of obedience.’

Self-centered license

Jesus paid it all. Therefore, I can live any way I want- lawless indifference to my failures.

3. The appropriate response

Hate your sin

Seeing your sin is a heart check that prevents self-righteous moralism.

Esteem the law

The law is Spiritual - God breathed and reflects God's character. Its holy righteous and good. It's the antidote for going off the rails in careless antinomianism.

III. Deliverance through Christ

"Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ!" (v. 24, 25)

1. Despair is attached to hope

Never separate these two verses. Knowing your own wretchedness drives you to the gospel of glory. *"Only then will we know the hope and liberation of looking away from ourselves and to what God has done."* (Keller, 171)

2. When sin captivates us

Literally 'the body of *this* death.' A living death.

"It is the death which flows from captivity to the law of sin. The body is the instrument and sphere of operation of the law of sin unto that death which is the wages of sin." (Murray, 269)

3. The promise of future bodily resurrection gives us hope

Thanksgiving is grounded in the assurance of our future bodily resurrection –the not yet.

"The Lord Jesus Christ... will transform the body of our humiliation into the likeness of the body of His glory." (Phil 3:21)

4. The assurance of present resurrection power transforms us

Just as *"Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life."* (Rom 6:4)

5. Through your husband, Jesus Christ

"For your husband is your maker...and redeemer who has called you like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit." (Is 54:5-6) He is the way out and the way through.

6. He won't stop loving you

"I will abundantly pardon. For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord." (Is 55:7, 8)

"Almost all progress in obedience comes not from your commitment to progress in obedience, but comes from your commitment to the One who will love you even when you don't progress in obedience." (Steve Brown)

Resources

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