

Dead to the Law, Alive to Christ

David Carter

Unshakeable: Romans / Ro 7:1-13

I don't know how many people can identify with me, but I am a rule guy. Like I'm the guy who before we play a new board game as a family, I have to read through the whole rule book and make sure everyone understands. And if you break a rule in the game, I will call you out and google it, to prove you wrong.

I'm the guy that if there is a policy in place, a bylaw, I will bring it up and challenge us to follow it, because I believe that the people before us, put those policies and by laws in place for a reason. I'm that guy.

And in most cases, that's good, that's healthy, that's true. But mentality, it can be taken to unhealthy places, can't it? Like, if I'm more worried about enforcing rules than having fun with my family, and enjoying our time together, then I've missed the point of the game. And if I am unable to see or admit that some policies or bylaws are out of date or context with where we are as an organization, then I may hinder growth.

I think the same can be said about our relationship with Christ. When it comes to our understanding of the role of the law in the life of the believer. I believe that God has given us commands in His Word for a reason. They are there for our protection, for our spiritual health and not for our harm. God's commands give us a clear direction of what it looks like to live in a faithful relationship with Him.

But if I start mistaking God's commands for relationship, if I'm so obsessed with obedience that it is robbing me of the joy of the Lord, if I start thinking that I can earn God's love and affection through my obedience to His commands than I'm missing the point.

See, I think that's what Paul is starting to drive home for us in our chapter this morning. He wants us to see that in Christ we have a new relationship with God's Law. He wants us to see that we have died to the law, so that we can live for Christ.

Here's the message for us this morning.

That God's law is perfect and holy — but it was never designed to save you. That's not what it's for.

The law shows you everything that's wrong but can't make anything right.

Look with me this morning at our passage in [Romans 7](#).

As we open to Romans chapter 7, some important themes continue on from chapter 6. Paul continues to explain to us just what being united in Christ's death and resurrection mean for us. How it changes our lives.

In essence, what we are seeing unfold in these chapters is the fruit of the gospel, what the gospel produces in the life of the believer.

And what Paul has been hammering home is that the gospel transforms, it changes a believer from the inside out.

Because we have died with Christ, and we have been resurrected with Christ we are a new creation. And we've been unpacking what all of that means.

That because we are a new creation, we have a new relationship with God through Jesus, a relationship where sin is no longer our master, a relationship where we are empowered through the Holy Spirit to say no to sin and yes to righteousness.

But Paul has been making some provocative statements along the way, that he has had to deal with the anticipated objections. One of the most provocative statements he makes, that he knows is going to get backlash with his audience is his statement in chapter 6:14.

He says this in [Romans 6:14](#).

¹⁴ ***For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.***

That statement, you are not under the law, but under grace... Would jump out at his readers. Because Paul is writing to a mixed group, a group that is made up of Gentiles, as well as Jews.

And the Gentile may be able to get behind what he's saying, but the Jews who have been raised in the Law and taught to memorize the Law, the Jews who would hear the words of David and the prophets of the Old Testament saying oh how I love your Law oh Lord, they would say wait a minute, hold on Paul what are you talking about?

Paul knows how provocative, how controversial that statement is, so much so that he takes time to address the common objections. The first being, what are you saying Paul that we don't have to obey God, that we don't have to obey the Law?

And he took that time with us last week to show us, no, no absolutely not, you have been set free from the Law to serve God, you may no longer be a slave to sin, but you are a slave to obey God, leading to eternal life.

So then what do you mean Paul, what do you mean that we have been set free, released from the Law?

Here's where he starts peeling back the curtain on this.

Here's what Paul wants us to see.

FREED FROM THE LAW

We have been freed from the Law, but not from obedience... that's what he's getting at in verses 1-6, look there with me.

But the point comes into focus in verse 4.

Romans 7:4 ESV

⁴ Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.

Here's the point that Paul is getting at. That you and I, by faith in Christ, have died to the Law and therefore have been set free from the law.

He's starting to expand our understanding of just what it means to be united in Christ's death. He's already told us that because we died with Christ on the cross, that we died to sin and the power of sin, but now he expands that and says, not only dead to sin, but we're dead to the law. And to prove his point he starts by making a legal argument.

Romans 7:1 ESV

¹ Or do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives?

Now that's not just a biblical principle, that's a universal truth. The law is binding on a person only as long as he lives.

You cannot prosecute a dead person; you cannot drag them into court and hold a legal proceeding or pronounce a verdict or hold them accountable to a law they are no longer alive to be bound by. Death dissolves legal obligation — that's just how law works.

But Paul's saying the same legal principle applies to God's Law. Those who have died, cannot be bound to the Law. We've died with Christ; the Law has no bearing on those who have died with Christ.

He wants to make sure we understand this and so he uses another example, the example of marriage.

Look at verses 2-3.

Romans 7:2-3 ESV

² For 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. ³ 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.

He says this principle applies in cases of a husband and a wife. If a wife is married to her husband, she is bound to him, and he to her so long as they are both living.

If she were to live with another man while still married, she would be guilty of adultery. But when a death has taken place, the law no longer applies. If that woman becomes a widow, if her husband dies and she decides to marry another man, she is free to do that, the law no longer applies to her, she is free to be bound to another.

And he says a similar thing has happened to you and I. That through our union in Christ by faith, we have died. We died with Christ, not so that we might live for ourselves, but that we might live for another.

Do you see what he's saying? Look at verse 4.

Romans 7:4 ESV

⁴ Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.

We died with Jesus and so we died to the Law, but that doesn't mean we can now do whatever we like, because just as the wife has chosen to be bound to another, you and I are bound to another, we are bound to Christ.

We died, not so that we can live in our own selfish, sinful desires, but we have died so that in this new life we might live for Christ.

Do you see what that means? We don't make up the rules as we go along — but we live a life that honours Christ. There's a more powerful principle at play here. The principle of relationship. I live for Christ. My life is for Him.

It means I don't need a list of laws any longer. I simply ask myself — does this bring honour to Christ? Does it reflect who He is and who He's called me to be?

Think about it this way. When I go home, I don't need rules on the walls reminding me not to harm my family. I don't need a posted policy telling me to be kind and patient and present. My relationship with them drives me toward what's best for them. My relationship with them is the motivation.

And that's exactly what's happened with Christ. The fact that I live for Christ, my relationship with Christ produces in me what the Law never could.

It's the difference of motivation. It's not that the truth of the Law doesn't apply to us, but my obedience comes from a different place, a different motivation.

Paul isn't saying that the Law doesn't have a role in the life of the believer, he's simply saying we have a new relationship. Life that desires to bear fruit for God.

What does he mean then that we have died to the Law?

Well, I think it's important to note that the issue isn't God's Law. The issue is our *relationship* with the Law.

When Paul talks about the Law, his readers would have understood exactly what he meant — God's revealed standard for how His people were to live, whether that's the 10 commands or the whole Torah.

But here's the problem. Many people believed that the Law was the *way* of righteousness. That relationship with God, forgiveness, salvation — all of it was found in obeying God's Law. Keep the Law and you're right with God. Break it and you're not.

And what Paul is saying is that in Christ, we have died to the Law as a way of righteousness. As a path to forgiveness. As the basis of our relationship with God.

We are now under a New Covenant — which means God has established a new relationship with His people through Jesus. And under that New Covenant we have a new relationship with the Law.

It means the ceremonial requirements of the Old Testament — what I eat, what I wear, what days I observe — those were always shadows pointing forward to Christ. We have died to those because Christ is the reality they were pointing to. He is the fulfilment of everything they represented.

It means we no longer need animal sacrifices, because Christ was the greatest and final sacrifice for sin.

But not only have we died to the Law as a way of righteousness — we have died to the *penalty* of the Law.

Because here's the reality. And there is a penalty for breaking it. You and I have in fact broken God's Law.

Jesus on the cross fulfilled both the *requirements* of the Law and the *penalty* of the Law on our behalf.

We are no longer under the Law.

But hear me, that doesn't mean we don't walk in obedience.

It simply means we have a new relationship with obedience, look at what Paul says in verse 6.

Romans 7:6 ESV

⁶ But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

Do you see what he's saying, we have been released from the Law, but we just serve in a new way, not by obeying a written code but through the power of the Holy Spirit.

See, you and I have something the Old Testament saints did not have, we have the Holy Spirit living in us, and the Holy Spirit is doing a work in you, in me. He is growing us in holiness and righteousness. Paul will dig deeper into this in chapter 8, but the Spirit is the answer, the Spirit does what the Law fails to do, He empowers us to walk in righteousness.

We walk in obedience not through the Law, but through the power of the Spirit.

See, here's what the Holy Spirit does; He produces fruit in your life and my life, that's what Paul says in [Galatians 5](#), you know those verses.

Galatians 5:22–23 ESV

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

This is what the Spirit produces in our lives: love, joy, peace patience... but did you notice that last part Paul says, he says against such things there is no law, what does that mean? Well it means if these things are being produced in you and me through the Holy Spirit, and we are walking in love, we'll be walking in obedience.

The whole Law is summed up in this, love God and love your neighbour.

If the Holy Spirit is producing love in you — genuine love for God and neighbour — you're already fulfilling what the Law requires. Not because you're trying to keep a list, but because the Spirit is doing from the inside what the Law could only demand from the outside.

That's the new way of the Spirit. That's what we've been released into.

So, we haven't been freed from obedience — we've been freed from the exhausting, impossible task of trying to produce righteousness on our own.

The Spirit does what the Law never could. It's why Paul says: walk in the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

I know what it feels like to get this wrong.

Early in my walk with Christ I had a past. And because of that past I leaned hard into the rules. I thought if I could just be obedient enough, disciplined enough, keep the Law well enough — that somehow that would make me acceptable. That God would love me more. That I could outrun what I used to be.

And it burned me out. I lost the joy of serving the Lord. Obedience became a grind. Church became a performance. My relationship with God became a checklist.

But slowly the Lord softened my heart and showed me the beauty of grace. That His love wasn't something I had to earn — it was something I had already been given in Christ

Maybe that describes you this morning.

You're burdened, you're exhausted, you're burnt out and depressed because your identity is found in your obedience to God, but you never seem to live up to your own expectations. This message is for you...

You have been set free from that burden, you've been released to live in relationship with the God who saved you, and obedience is not found in keeping a list of rules but walking in and living in the love that God's Holy Spirit is producing in you.

But then here's the question that would naturally be asked. Then what is the purpose of the Law?

Is there something wrong with the Law, is it flawed, did it fail?

Paul anticipates that question and here's what he wants us to know.

The problem isn't God's Law. The problem is that people have tried to use the Law for something it was never designed to do. They've tried to use it as a ladder

to climb to God. As a way of earning His love and favour. But that was never its purpose.

The Law was never intended to produce righteousness. The purpose of the Law is to reveal righteousness.

REVEAL RIGHTEOUSNESS

The Law reveals righteousness, what righteousness looks like.

We see Paul anticipating and answering this question in verse 7.

Romans 7:7 ESV

7 What then 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."

The issue isn't the Law, the Law does what it was intended to do, it reveals what righteousness is, it sets the standard. How could I know that something is wrong, or if something doesn't meet the mark, if I don't know what the mark is.

The Law does what those speed limit signs do on the highway. They tell you the Law, they tell you what the limit is, and they tell you not only what the Law is, but they reveal to you when you're wrong. The signs set the mark.

Otherwise everyone would just drive as slow or as fast as they want and there would be no one to say who's right or wrong.

The Law reveals righteousness, and it shows us what sin is. We need that. We need that because in our culture, in our world, the standard of morality and righteousness is always shifting.

Like, I remember when I was growing up, marijuana was illegal and considered immoral. Now you can walk down the street and smell it and nobody blinks.

Think about how our definition of marriage has changed — what marriage looked like twenty years ago is not what it looks like today. In fact, I was reading

an article recently advocating for our Laws to be adapted to make room for polyamorous relationships.

And it doesn't stop there. What was considered wrong a generation ago is celebrated today. What was celebrated a generation ago is now considered offensive. The goalposts keep moving. And if culture sets the standard for right and wrong, then right and wrong change with every generation.

We need something fixed. Something immovable. A standard that doesn't shift with culture or feeling or the latest headline.

God's Law gives us exactly that.

We need that even for our own conscience, don't we?

Because you and I have a way of self-justification, of blurring the lines in our own lives and our own consciences. We have a way of deluding and deceiving ourselves that even though something may look wrong or feel wrong, it's okay in our life situation and that God understands.

And so we need a clear statement that cuts through the self-deception and draws a clear line, we need something that sets that standard and makes it clear.

That's the role of the Law, to reveal God's standard of righteousness.

But it's not just negative, it doesn't just tell us what's wrong, it tells us what it looks like to live in relationship with a Holy God. When you think about what the Law reveals, it reveals righteousness, because God is righteous.

Our calling is to reflect the image of God, part of that is that we were created to reflect His righteousness.

God doesn't give us His law arbitrarily. Every command reflects who He is. He calls us to honesty because He is truth — He cannot lie, He does not deceive. He calls us to justice because He is just — He will not turn a blind eye to wrong. He calls us to sexual faithfulness because He is faithful — His covenant love never

wanders. He calls us not to murder because every human being bears His image — to destroy a person is to attack the image of God Himself.

His law isn't a random list of rules. It's a reflection of His character. And when He calls us to live by it, He is calling us to look like Him.

And because the Law reflects who God is, it also protects who we are.

God's commands aren't designed to restrict your joy — they're designed to protect from ourselves. He knows what we were made for and His Law keeps us from destroying ourselves trying to find purpose and meaning in the wrong places.

I think about a moment that happened when our kids were young. We were at a friend's house after church for a family swim. Our youngest was only about two. My wife was getting her ready — fastening her life jacket — and for two seconds turned her back to grab it.

Our daughter took off running and jumped straight into the pool. Sank right to the bottom. I watched my wife reach down in one motion and pull her out.

In that moment we understood exactly why our friends had a fence around that pool.

Guardrails aren't restrictions. They're protection. That fence was good and necessary and right. It was there because our friends loved their kids and loved ours.

That's exactly what God's Law is. It's not a cage. It's a fence around the pool. It's there because He loves you.

But here's what I want you to notice — the fence didn't save my daughter. My wife did. The fence could only do so much. It couldn't reach into the water and pull her out.

And that's precisely the limit of the Law.

The Law can reveal where we've gone wrong, but it cannot make it right.

It reveals what righteousness looks like, but it cannot produce righteousness within us.

The Law can reveal righteousness, but the Law cannot make me right...

MAKE ME RIGHT

In fact, quite the opposite happens, the Law that is meant to bring life, produces death.

Look at what Paul says in verses 8-13.

Romans 7:8-13 ESV

⁸ But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. ⁹ I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. ¹⁰ The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. ¹¹ For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. ¹² So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

¹³ Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.

Something happens in me when I'm exposed to the Law, it actually provokes me to sin, but not because something is wrong with the Law, Paul wants to be very clear about that, so clear. In verse 12 it says that the Law is holy and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

The issue is sin, not my actions, remember? It's the condition of sin that humankind is in, it infects every aspect of who I am including how I respond to the Law. Something happens and we all know this.

Paul makes mention of the commandment of coveting in verse 7, he says how could I have known not to covet unless the Law told me you shall not covet, but then in verse 8 he says, but something interesting happens when the Law tells me not to covet, it produced all kinds of coveting in me, sin seems to come alive when I hear the Law.

What does that mean? Well, I think we all know what this means, when someone tells us that we can't do something, we instinctively want to do it. If someone gives us a command, there is this instinct in us to rebel.

We could go back to those speed limits again, the sign says 100 km's an hour but if it says 100, everyone is going to go at least 110, or most 120 and a few years ago on some major highways the increased the limit to 120, but you know what happened, everyone is now going 130 or more.

Why? Because there is this natural instinct in us to rebel against the law, to break the rules, rules are made to be broken.

And it becomes more personal, it's why when my parents told me not to smoke I wanted to smoke all the more, or not hang out with certain people, or do certain things. Those were the exact things I wanted to do. Why? Not because there is something wrong with the commands, no because there is something broken inside all of us.

And Paul puts his finger on it. Look at verse 11.

Romans 7:11 ESV

¹¹ For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.

Sin seizes an opportunity through the commandment... that word seizing should jump out at us. That's military language. That's an army seizing enemy territory — invading, occupying, taking ground and using it as a base to launch further attacks.

That's what sin does. It takes the Law — something holy and good — and uses it as a beachhead to launch its attacks.

Sin is an occupying force. And the Law is powerless to drive that army out. It can show you the territory that's been taken. It cannot take it back.

The Law cannot make us righteous, in fact the opposite happens, by nature we want to rebel, by nature, in our own power we cannot keep God's Law, we fail every time, we lean towards sin, left to ourselves we run toward it.

Even when exposed, the goodness and holiness of the Law, our sinfulness takes control and uses that opportunity to produce rebellion in us.

Here's the problem for you and I. God's Law is not a suggestion, it's not guidance or helpful advice, it is the Law, it is a command.

Apart from Christ we are unable to keep God's Law. Like let me just think through the 10 commandments with you.

Let's just start with an easy one, bearing false witness, have you ever told a lie? Or how about stealing have you ever taken something that doesn't belong to you?

Honouring your parents, how many times have I dishonoured my parents especially when I was younger?

How about coveting? Have you ever wanted something that belonged to someone else, something that wasn't yours, but you wanted it and felt jealous because you couldn't get it?

Yeah, but not the big ones you'd say, like I've never murdered or killed anyone, I've never cheated on my spouse, that's got to count for something.

But Jesus comes along and He turns that on its head when He says God's Law isn't just about your actions, but your heart. In the Sermon on the Mount He says you may not have committed adultery, but have you ever wanted to? Have you ever fantasized about someone else, and you've never murdered no, but have

you gotten angry and had hatred and anger in your heart? Then you're still guilty.

We're all law breakers, and the problem with being a law breaker is that there are consequences to breaking God's Law. The consequences of breaking God's eternal Law, of offending an eternal God is eternal death, separation from God.

You get why this is such good news, right? You get now why we go back to the good news of chapter 6:14 when Paul says sin will no longer have dominion over you, since you are not under Law, but under grace?

Praise God, by faith in Jesus Christ we are no longer under the Law, no longer under the burden, the penalty, and the weight of the Law, we live in grace.

We start to see the truth Paul teaches at the beginning of this chapter in a different light, it's good news, isn't it? That we died with Christ and have died to the Law.

It's good news that we have a new relationship with the Law, that our obedience comes by the Work of the Holy Spirit living in us... good news.

The Law reveals sin, it tells us what the problem is, we keep missing the mark, but it cannot fix the problem it cannot make me right.

Only Jesus can...

And maybe you're sitting here this morning, and you've never placed your faith in Jesus Christ. You've never trusted Him as your Saviour. And everything I've just described — the law breaking, the heart condition, the rebellion, the consequences — that describes you this morning.

I want you to know that's exactly why Jesus came. Not to condemn you. Not to add to your burden. But to do what the Law never could. He came to pay the penalty that the Law demands. He came to take the verdict on Himself so that you wouldn't have to bear it.

The Law has shown you the problem. Jesus is the only answer to it.

And today you can stop trying to fix yourself. Today you can stop carrying that weight. Today you can place your faith in the one who has already paid it in full.

The Law shows you everything that's wrong. But Christ makes it right.