

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 8/10/2025

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Romans 7:1-6 “Legalism Is No Match for the Struggle Within”<sup>\*\*1</sup>

Series: “*The Struggle Within – An Exposition of Romans 7*”

Main Idea: In Romans 7:1-6, God’s Word urges us to think carefully about three subjects pertaining to the Law which will prevent us from moving into legalism and more importantly, enable us to experience the power of the gospel in our daily struggle.

- I. Think carefully about the believer’s relationship to the Law (1).
  - A. The Law does not bind us.
  - B. Death cancels all contracts.
- II. Think carefully about the illustration of marriage (2-3).
  - A. Marriage is for life.
  - B. If a woman’s spouse dies, she is free to remarry.
- III. Think carefully about the implications that pertain to legalism (4-6).
  - A. We are in a new relationship (4).
    1. We were married to the Law.
    2. We now belong to Christ.
  - B. We are not what we used to be (5).
    1. We were in the flesh.
    2. We produced fruit unto death.
  - C. We live under a different authority (6).
    1. We are delivered from the Law.
    2. We are free to serve, not sin.
    3. We live in the Spirit, not under a written code.

Make It Personal: It matters how we think.

*Scripture Memory Song:* Psalm 9:10

*New Series:* There’s a battle raging within us, all of us, if we’re honest with ourselves. I’m talking to Christians now. Christians encounter a daily struggle and during my past three month sabbatical break, it didn’t go away. In fact, in some ways I think the intensity of the struggle increased.

I didn’t begin one day in May, June, or July intending to say hurtful things to my wife. I didn’t plan on losing my temper. I didn’t put on my schedule, “Be selfish today.” So why did those things happen to me?

Even the way I framed that question isn’t right. Those things didn’t happen *to* me. They happened *in* me. Nothing causes me to sin from the outside. Sure, there are influences, temptations, pressure points. But they don’t cause sin. Sin is internal. Sins come from the heart, according to Jesus (Matthew 15:19).

Why is it that the Christian life is so hard? Why is it that we so often fail to do the good things we intend to do in a day and end up doing the bad things we didn’t intend to do?

Church is the perfect place to talk about these matters. And the Bible, the very Word of God, is the perfect place to find answers. As others have remarked, “Church isn’t supposed to be a showcase for saints but a hospital for sinners.”

God wants His people to talk about this struggle. And He wants His people to make progress in dealing with this struggle. It’s why His Son came and went to the cross and walked out of His tomb. It’s why His Spirit recorded letters to churches in the first

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<sup>\*\*</sup> Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

<sup>1</sup> For a look at a parallel passage, see Mark 4:1-20 in the Mark series in 2004 and in 2022.

century that address the real problems His people were facing, providing real answers that bring joy to their lives and glory to His worthy name.

The Lord has given us a wonderful passage in His Word that addresses the very questions I've raised, and we're going to spend the next month (if He allows) probing this relevant text. I've entitled our series is *The Struggle Within*, an exposition of Romans 7. This vital text addresses four related themes and we'll explore each one by one.

7:1-6 "*Legalism Is No Match for the Struggle Within*"

7:7-12 "*Dealing with the Objections of a Legalistic Heart*"

7:13-20 "*An Honest Confession about the Struggle Within*"

7:21-25 "*Winning the War Within*"

Let's begin by reading today's text.

*Scripture Reading: Romans 7:1-6*

I hadn't been a Christian very long when I learned that there are two dangerous extremes which seem to attract the people of God. I was just a young boy, but I knew they were real. One is license, and the other is legalism.

I saw license represented by a 7th grader named Richard who rode the same school bus as I did. Richard was a professing Christian—he told me so—but the profanity and off-colored jokes I heard coming out of his mouth revealed something very contradicting. License says we are free to live as we please. License says if we give God Sunday, we can do what we want the other six days. I've learned since then there are lots of Richards in churches.

Then there's the other extreme, legalism. I ran into this early on as well. I started meeting people who lived by a very stringent list of do's and don'ts, and they also demanded that everyone else do the same. They seemed to operate by the mindset, "Yes, we're saved by grace, but if we're going to please God we need some Law, too. Grace just isn't enough." So they fill their lives with laws, not God's law, but their own.

For instance, some said that good Christian boys don't play sports on the Lord's Day, that good Christian girls don't wear slacks to church (or anywhere else in public), that guys don't let their hair grow over their ears, that neither guys nor gals listen to music that has anything but a 4/4 beat, and certainly don't read any Bible version other than the one authorized by King James in the 1600s.

And so went the list of the legalist, a list which was very impressive, clean, tidy, measurable, intimidating, non-negotiable, and always open to addition. The legalist loves to generate new laws when he or she thinks it's necessary.

Which is better? License, or legalism? That's like asking, which is better, starving to death or binging on 10,000 calories of junk food a day? You end up dead either way.

Grace *is* wonderful and liberating, as license emphasizes. And it's not cheap either, as the legalist reminds us. But both extremes compromise God's glorious gospel and are equally dangerous.

No book makes this any clearer than the book of Romans which presents the gospel of God's grace so clearly. And no passage makes this any clearer than Romans 6-7. In Romans 6, Paul addresses the extreme of license, as we saw in our mini-series back in the Spring, "*No Longer a Slave to Sin*". Paul gives the punchline in Romans 6:15 when he asks, "What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!"

As a Christian, I have no right to do my own thing because I have died with Christ and been raised with Christ and now belong to Christ. License is out.

What about legalism? Paul addresses this extreme in chapter 7. I've circled the word "law" and encourage you to do the same. Paul uses the word twenty-three times in this chapter. Law. Law. Law.

In verse 1 Paul says, "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?" In verse 4 he says "you have died to the **law**...so that you may belong to another." In verse 5 he says our sinful passions were "aroused by the **law**". In verse 6 he says we are now "released from the **law**." Then he says the law is "spiritual" in verse 14, and says he "delights in the **law** of God" in verse 22. But then he says there's another law in verse 23 that "wages war against the **law** of my mind" and "makes me captive to the **law** of sin that dwells in my members."

This is the struggle within. "For I do not understand my own actions," says Paul in verse 15. "For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. <sup>16</sup> Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the **law**, that it is good. <sup>17</sup> So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me (15-17)."

"Wretched man that I am!" he confesses in verse 24. "Who will deliver me from this body of death?" he asks. And then offers this hope-giving answer as he concludes the chapter in verse 25, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the **law** of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the **law** of sin."

Friends, this is a tough text. If we're going to understand it and experience its power, we're going to need to do some careful thinking. What does Paul mean by "law"? And what are these different "laws" he mentions? He's not writing as an academic. This is personal. There's a war raging and he's sharing from experience what this war feels like and how we can experience victory in it.

What really is legalism? Warren Wiersbe explains, "It is the belief that I can become holy and please God by obeying laws. It is measuring spirituality by a list of do's and don'ts. The weakness of legalism is that it sees *sins* (plural) but not *sin* (the root of the trouble). It judges by the outward and not the inward."<sup>2</sup>

The problem of the legalist is that he doesn't understand the relationship between Law and grace. He doesn't know correctly the purpose of God's Law. May I ask you a question. Do you know? What is the place of the Law in the life of the Christian? How we answer this question determines whether we have strayed into the extreme of legalism.

In Romans 7:1-6, God's Word urges us to think carefully about three subjects pertaining to the Law which will prevent us from moving into legalism and more importantly, enable us to experience the power of the gospel in our daily struggle.

#### I. Think carefully about the believer's relationship to the Law (1).

Notice verse 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?"

Frankly, Romans 7 is one of the most difficult passages in the Bible to interpret. William Barclay observed, "Seldom did Paul write so difficult and so complicated a

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<sup>2</sup> Warren Wiersbe, p. 534.

passage as this.”<sup>3</sup> C. H. Dodd (ibid) remarked that when we are studying it we should try to forget what Paul says and to find out what he means (whatever that means!). What's going on in Romans 7?

The issue is the believer's relationship to the Law, specifically the Mosaic Law, the Torah. In the early years of Christianity this was a hotly debated matter. For over 1400 years, the Law of God had been at the center of Jewish life. And remember, for the first ten years or so, the early church was predominantly Jewish. God's people (the Jews) had lived by the Law for fourteen centuries. It did not save them, but it did reveal God's character and expectations to them.

All we need do is scan Genesis to Deuteronomy and see how the Law spelled out in detail all kinds of matters. How God's people were supposed to worship, and when and where. How to cook food, what to eat and what not to eat. What to do with mildew, and open sores on the body, and crops on the edge of a field. In the Law, God was teaching holiness to His people. To be holy meant to live according to these written guidelines. Such was life under the old covenant.

Then Jesus came, and what did He do? First, He said He fulfilled the Law. He kept the Law perfectly. He never sinned. He obeyed God's commands without a glitch for thirty-three years, something no human being had ever done nor could do.

Then secondly, He said He established a new covenant. “This is the new covenant in my blood which is for you (Luke 22:20).” Read the book of Hebrews. Jesus established a new and better covenant. Don't miss this. The church exists under the terms of the new covenant, not the old Mosaic covenant.

So what about the Law? Since we are not Israel, but the Church, and since we live under the new covenant, not the old, are we under the Law? And if we're not under the Law, does that mean that lawlessness is acceptable? You can see why this issue was so controversial in the early church. In fact, a group known as the Judaizers tried to make keeping the Law a requirement for salvation (see Galatians).

It's this debate that provides the backdrop for Romans 7. Notice how Paul begins to address this controversy. He puts two bottom line realities on the table in verse 1.

**A. The Law does not bind us.** “Do you not know, *brothers*,” he begins. This is family business. Paul is writing brother to brother to Christians. Yet not just any Christians. These are Christians who know the Jewish Law.

They're also free, a word Paul just used in the previous verses (there's an unfortunate chapter break). We read in Romans 6:20, “For when you were slaves of sin, you were **free** in regard to righteousness.” Then in verse 22, “But now that you have been set **free** from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.”<sup>23</sup> For the wages of sin is death, but the **free** gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

You're free. What made you free? The law? No. The glorious gospel did! By believing in the finished work of Jesus Christ, God set you free from sin.

So what now is true of the law? It no longer binds us. That's the word Paul uses in verse 1 when he says, “The law is binding on a person only as long as he lives.” If we're in Christ, we no longer live but Christ lives in us, right? That's Galatians 2:20. And that's gospel reality which Paul will develop more fully as he goes. The law does not bind us. Which brings us to a second reality.

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<sup>3</sup> William Barclay, p. 92.

**B. Death cancels all contracts.** Listen to how the Living Bible paraphrases Paul's question in verse 1, "Don't you understand yet, dear Jewish brothers in Christ, that when a person dies the law no longer holds him in its power?" We understand this. Even in our day a person is legally bound to keep the law as long as he's alive. But a dead person isn't, is he? You can't expect a dead man to obey the speed limit or pay taxes or do anything. He can't. He's dead. Death cancels all contracts.

This is the issue in verse 1. The verb "binding" [AV "hath dominion"] means "to be lord of." The NASB uses the word "jurisdiction." The Christian is not under the jurisdiction of the Mosaic Law.

Did you realize the Mosaic Law says we can't plant a field with two kinds of seed, nor can we wear clothing woven of two kinds of material, and can't eat any meat with blood in it (Leviticus 17:10-11)? Why are we no longer bound by those stipulations? To answer these questions, it's time to think carefully about a second subject.

## II. Think carefully about the illustration of marriage (2-3).

In chapter 6, Paul used a slavery metaphor to make his point, but in chapter 7 he uses marriage. He says in verse 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." In the marriage illustration Paul makes two points perfectly clear.

**A. Marriage is for life.** The Law says a woman is bound to be faithful to her husband (and a man to his wife). We read in Exodus 20:14, "You shall not commit adultery." This is a command rooted in the creation account of Genesis 2:24, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave unto his wife; and they two shall be one flesh." According to the Law, marriage is for life.

Keep in mind that Paul's primary aim here isn't to teach us about marriage, but about the law. Marriage is simply an illustration. A clear one too. We understand this. When two people marry, it's for life. That's what the law says.

Can the law give you a good marriage? No. It can tell you to hang in there when things get rough, but the law lacks the power to give you a good marriage. Something else is needed. *Someone* else is needed. The Lawgiver, the One who said He came to that we might have life and life more abundantly (John 10:10).

Paul adds another layer to his illustration at the end of verse 2. "But if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage."<sup>4</sup> Again, it goes both ways. Marriage is for life for the husband too. But what happens if the spouse dies? We understand what happens. This is basic case law, in Israel and our country too.

**B. If a woman's spouse dies, she is free to remarry.** Again, we understand this. When two people marry, it's for life. But in this fallen world, the time will come when a death will occur. What should the surviving spouse do? They will grieve, for sure. But in time, should they desire and the Lord provide, they are free to marry again.

Keep in mind Paul isn't teaching about marriage so much as how the law works in marriage. He elaborates in verse 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."

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<sup>4</sup> The AV says, "But if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband [better translated "concerning her husband"]."

Again, we get the point. We know that if a married woman gets involved with another man, it's not a good thing. She's breaking God's law, and even a person who has never read the Bible can understand this for God has given all of us a conscience. If we violate this law we experience guilt and shame which we can try to ignore but can never escape.

But what if the spouse dies? It's no longer adultery. Remarriage is permissible after her husband dies. In fact, later in the New Testament, Paul addresses this very matter when he encourages young widows to remarry (see 1 Timothy 5:14). His point in Romans 7 is that a widow who remarries is not guilty of adultery. Her husband's death changed the way she relates to the law that bound her to her husband when he was alive. The demands of that law have been met and fulfilled.

Perhaps you're wondering, "Is this verse saying that the death of a spouse is the only situation which gives a person permission to remarry?" Some say yes. They say that divorce and remarriage are not permitted under any circumstances. I don't agree. Again, let's keep in mind that Paul's intent isn't to teach about marriage and remarriage here, so much as to use marriage as an illustration. But since the question is such a vital one in our day, and since the Bible does address it elsewhere, allow me to digress for a moment and sketch two biblical guidelines.

Here's the first. By God's design, marriage is for life. It's a covenant relationship which God intended to be dissolved by death alone (Gen 2:24). It's a promise to God and to a partner affirmed by witnesses.

Here's the second. In addition to death, there are two other situations in which a marriage may end. One is *desertion*, which is detailed in 1 Corinthians 7:15, which says, "But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved [AV "A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases"]. God has called you to peace." In other words, if a Christian's unsaved spouse gets fed up with living with a Christian and leaves the home, the Christian is to let him or her go.

The other situation is what Jesus called "*sexual immorality*" ["fornication"], that is, when a person engages in sexual activity outside of the marriage bond. Jesus says in Matthew 5:32, "But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

Yet the Bible does not say sexual immorality *must* dissolve a marriage, and in fact, if restoration is possible, the person should carefully and prayerfully consider the gospel opportunity in pursuing it. For example, think of Hosea. Did he have grounds to divorce his wife Gomer who played the harlot? Yes, but he chose to be faithful to her even though she wasn't to him, and took steps to rescue and restore her by buying her in the slave market. And this points to the greatest lover of all, God Himself. Think of how God (just like Hosea) continues to show us His unfailing love to us when we've been unfaithful to Him.

You say, "Wait a minute. People divorce for other reasons, don't they?" Yes, they do. They say, "We're not compatible anymore." Or, "We don't love each other anymore." Or, "We don't have anything in common anymore." Or, "We're not happy." Or, "My partner doesn't meet my needs."

God's way is so much better. He is the God of hope and He offers hope when people lose hope through the power of His Son. And He often uses the ministry of His people to provide that hope. If you're struggling, my friend, let us help.<sup>5</sup>

Now back to Paul's argument in Romans 7. He used the marriage illustration to show us that the law applies until death occurs, and that when death occurs, it cancels the contract. Now what does that have to do with legalism? We'll see in verses 4-6.

### III. Think carefully about the implications that pertain to legalism (4-6).

Paul begins verse 4, "Likewise, my brothers." He's talking to brothers, to those who are in Christ. He's about to move from illustration to application. He's going to show us three implications.

**A. We are in a new relationship (4).** Verse 4 says, "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."

Think carefully now. What is true of us? We're in a new relationship. What was our old relationship?

1. *In essence, we were married to the law.* Under the old covenant God's people were bound by the contractual guidelines of the Mosaic law. We, particularly Paul's Jewish readers, were married to the law. We were tied to it and bound by it.

But now? A change has occurred and we're no longer married to the law. What happened that made this change possible? A death occurred. Whose death? Notice Paul says, "You also have died to the law through [AV says "by"] the body of Christ." What happened to Christ, happened to us who believe in Christ. He died. We died.

In the marriage illustration, Paul says a wife is free from the marriage law if a death occurs. Paul now says a death has occurred. Christ died. And we died because of our union with Him. Christ's death on the cross set us free from the bondage of the law.

But there's more. At the end of verse 4 Paul says that the One who died for us didn't stay dead. He has been raised from the dead. His death nullified the old law. What did His resurrection do? His resurrection brought us into a new relationship. With whom? With Himself.

2. *We now belong to Christ.* We now have a new allegiance. We are no longer living under the stipulations of the contract of the Mosaic law. Was that law bad? No, but we couldn't keep it. Christ did. He fulfilled the law, and now we belong to Him.

Does that mean we are free to do our own thing? Certainly not. What are we now free to do since we belong to Christ? Paul gives the answer at the end of verse 4. This is the purpose for which Christ died and rose again. "In order that we may bear fruit for God."

A fruitful life. A God-focused, God-pleasing life. This is the potential we have if we belong to Christ. The law can't produce that kind of life. But Christ can.

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<sup>5</sup> Another question that follows is this. If a person has biblical grounds for divorce, is remarriage appropriate? Again, godly people differ at this point. Some say the answer is no, that I can be faithful to my marriage vow even if my partner isn't, that even if my partner deserts me or breaks the marriage by going after a third party, I can still keep my marriage vow by remaining single, for the sake of the kingdom. Others believe the Bible teaches that if the divorce has biblical grounds, it is assumed that remarriage is permissible.

No passages says it any better than Galatians 2:20. "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

Now a second implication. The first? We are in a new relationship. The second?

**B. We are not what we used to be (5).** Verse 5 explains, "For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death." What used to be true of us before Christ saved us? We had two problems.

1. *We were in the flesh.* What does Paul mean when he says "we were living in the flesh"? He's talking about our pre-Christian days.

This is Christian Anthropology 101. According to the Bible, there are only two categories of human existence. A person is either "in the flesh" or "in Christ". We're either "in the first Adam" or "in the last Adam." We are either "in the flesh" or "in the Spirit". These are the spheres of human existence, and there are only two. There is no middle ground.

Brothers and sisters, this is where our story begins. Before our conversion, we were in the flesh. And what was the result of being in the flesh?

2. *We produced fruit unto death.* When we were in the flesh, we were at the mercy of sin. Verse 5 says "our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death." In other words, when we were in the flesh, our sinful desires controlled us. We did what we wanted, and were powerless to do otherwise. The fruit of our lives wasn't for God, but for self, and it resulted in death.

Did the law help us when we were in the flesh? Yes and no. The problem wasn't with the law, but with us. The law could tell us what to do and not to do, and it did. But it couldn't enable us to do it. The law was a constant reminder of our shortcomings. It kept saying to us, "You have missed God's mark. You did it again. You are guilty."

Herein lies the problem of legalism. Having a dress code may make a person look presentable on the outside, but it can't produce a modest and pure heart. A hair code can't change a rebel's heart. Having a rule that makes your child read the Bible every day can't generate a heart that loves God.

Let's face it. Rules are attractive. I'm talking about the rules of men now, rules that people add to God's Word to try to produce godliness. Rules are safe. Rules are impressive. But rules produced by man produce self-righteousness, not God's righteousness. God's righteousness is produced inside-out by the work of His Spirit, not outside.

Frankly, Romans 7 reveals that even God's law can't produce righteousness. The Mosaic law, good as it is, is like a sack of hardened cement tied to our neck. It can't produce sanctification. It pulls us under and reveals our sinful helplessness.

So we don't need the law? Oh yes, we need it. It's the law that the Spirit uses to show us our need for a Savior. The law brings us to despair, which is a good and necessary thing, for then and only then will we cry out, "O God, be merciful to me a sinner! Save me!"

This brings us to a third implication. One, we are in a new relationship. Two, we're not what we used to be.



**C. We live under a different authority (6).** Paul explains in verse 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.”

Please don't miss this. To not be under the authority of the Mosaic law doesn't mean we are not under authority. We are, a different authority. According to verse 6, three realities are true of us now if we belong to Christ.

1. *We are delivered from the Law.* Verse 6 begins, “But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive.” Delivered, says the AV. Set free. The law wasn't bad. In fact, it was good according to verse 12. But it “held us captive.” It “bound” us (says the NASB and NIV). It was like a straight-jacket that was placed on the flesh to control it. Again, it was good, but no longer necessary. As Christians, we have been delivered from the law.

2. *We are free to serve, not sin.* Look at the purpose clause in the middle of verse 6, “So that we serve in the new way of the Spirit.” To say we are not under the law is not the same as lawlessness. In a very real sense, we are under a law. What law?

Listen to the following verses. **Galatians 5:22–23** says, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; *against such things there is no law.*” Then **Galatians 6:2**, “Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill *the law of Christ.*” Now consider **James 2:12**, “So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under *the law of liberty.*” “Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you,” said Jesus in His great commission (**Matthew 28:20**).”

So we're not anti-law. As believers we live under authority, the very law of Christ. What He says is what we do, and we do it enabled by His Spirit. To live in the Spirit is to fulfill the Law of Christ.

And this means we are free, not to sin, but to serve. Christ is our Master, not the Mosaic law. He is our standard. He calls us to follow in His steps (1 Peter 2:21). Which brings us to a third, vital reality which is at the heart of Christian living.

3. *We live in the Spirit, not under a written code.* Paul concludes verse 6 saying, “So that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.” In the KJV, the “s” in “spirit” is lower case. It's better to use a capital letter (as do the ESV, NIV, and NASB) for it refers to the Holy Spirit.

It's so easy to be drawn to living by the letter, to reduce the Christian life to keeping a set of rules. Legalism is so subtle, and actually, it's very hard for a legalist to admit he is one. A legalist makes godliness an external thing.

I remember when I was an RD at a Christian college and having conversations with guys in the dorm about what they were watching on television. They would get defensive when I questioned whether they should be watching a rather suggestive movie, and would say to me, “Hey, it's okay. It's not on the unacceptable list!”

But we do not live by the letter, but by the Spirit. Never forget that. We don't live by a list. We live to please a Person. Is that true of you? As someone once wrote, “I do not work my soul to save; that work my Lord hath done. But I will work like any slave for love of God's dear Son.” Can you say those words truthfully?

Perhaps a story by J. Vernon McGee will help us as we respond. Back before the Civil War, there was a plantation owner, a very handsome man who was married to a beautiful woman, and they lived happily in a lovely home. He became sick and died

suddenly, and his wife grieved terribly for she loved him so. Then she did a strange and morbid thing. She had his body embalmed, placed in a sitting position in an air-tight case, and situated in the hallway of her lovely southern home. Her friends knew this wouldn't do, so they encouraged her to leave and travel for awhile. She went North, and traveled for two years. During that time, she met another man, fell in love, and married him. On their honeymoon they came to her plantation home. The new bridegroom did as a new bridegroom is supposed to do, he picked her up and carried her over the threshold. When he put her down, he was staring into the face of a man in a glass case. He said to his bride, "Who is THAT?" Well, she had forgotten about him. She told him that he was her first husband. They both decided it was time to bury him, which was the proper thing to do. She was married to a new man; the old man was dead.<sup>6</sup>

McGee writes, "Now I confess that that is a ridiculous story; I sometimes wonder if it really ever happened. Whether or not the story is true, it is true that there are many believers today who have dug up the Law--in fact, they have never buried the Law. They have the Law sitting in a glass case, and they are trying to live by the Law in the strength of the old Adamic nature!"<sup>7</sup>

Make It Personal: When it comes to the struggle within, it matters how we think.

So think carefully about your relationship to the Law. Think carefully about the illustration of marriage. And think carefully about the implications that pertain to legalism. Legalism is no match for the struggle within. It just can't help us. There's only one solution to this problem. Let's pray to Him, sing to Him, and worship Him at His table. If you need to repent and put your faith in Him, why not now?

**Closing Song:** #428 "*I Need Thee Every Hour*" (all four verses)

**Communion**

**This evening's message:** Preachers in Training in 2 Peter

1:16 Matt Wilson

1:17-18 Douglas Goncalves

1:19-21 Drew Willis

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<sup>6</sup> J. Vernon McGee, pp. 124-5.

<sup>7</sup> McGee, p. 125.