

Romans Summary
Week 12, Wednesday November 30, 2016
Romans 7:1-12

Paul is continuing to answer his hypothetical question from chapter 6:14-15, reminding them that the law is only in force while a person lives. He then demonstrates his point. When a woman is married she becomes bound to her husband by the law. But, when her husband dies she is released from that law.

To emphasize the point he goes on. If while her husband is alive she were to marry a second man she would be called an adulteress because the law had bound her to her first husband only. Again, if her first husband died and she married a second man, she would not be called an adulteress. In short, upon death she is taken out from the domain of that law.

The key to understanding the parallel between the married couple and what Paul has to say in v. 4 is to know that there is a double 'you'. There is a 'you' which is the first husband and a 'you' which is the wife. By our death through the body of Christ (see chapter 6) our first husband died. The earlier language of the letter would be the 'old self' the 'in Adam' or 'Adamic' person — that died. Through that death we were freed from the law that bound us to that old self (again, chapter 6). So, now, the remaining 'wife' the self is free to be joined to Christ — which is what happened in his resurrection (again, see chapter 6!!). In short, you died so you could be joined to Christ.

More importantly, this new marriage is a fruitful one! This is a restatement of 6:21, but now in the marriage and childbearing context. Under the old marriage all that was born was fruit for death.

He then picks up on the new covenant and new creation language. We now serve (as a slave) in newness of the Spirit, rather than in the oldness of the letter. Through the new covenant of Jesus we, Christians, have what the law promised but couldn't give: life. This leads to a question about what we are saying about the law — is it identical with sin?

His answer, as usual, is NO! The law isn't sin itself, it is the means by which 'I' comes to know sin experientially, not just theoretically. Similar to Abraham in chapter 4 he begins to tell a story about coveting. He goes back to Genesis 3 — the fall of Adam (that person we used to be under). Adam did not covet the fruit until God prohibited him from it. Then sin, which was inactive prior, sprang to life and as a result Adam died. Sin, the power, took advantage of that law, using it to deceive Adam, thus killing Adam.

As Paul has already done, he keeps the story somewhat non-specific. Yes, it clearly applies to Adam (humanity), but it could (and does) also describe Israel at Sinai. Just where the Law comes to Israel and they affirm the covenant with YHWH they proceed to build the idol which leads to that whole generation dying in the wilderness. The Israel who went into the wilderness is a different one than the Israel who went into the promised land (notice the double 'you').

Paul's final word is to exonerate the Law. It is not sin. It is holy, righteous and good.

“Frodo and Free Will” reflection and discussion questions:

1. How have you grown up to think and feel about predestination?
2. Can you see anything beautiful, or helpful in it?

3. Do you see this conflict described by Paul, Augustine, Luther, and Rutledge in yourself and humanity?
4. Can predestination and freedom be identical?
5. In the second to last paragraph do you recognize Wesley's cooperant grace?