

Romans 7: 1-10—¹Do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to men who know the law—that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives? ²For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. ³So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man. ⁴So, my brothers, 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 to God. ⁵For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death. ⁶But 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. ⁷What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, “Do not covet.” ⁸But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead. ⁹Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. ¹⁰I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. ¹¹For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. ¹²So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good. ¹³Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.

- **Barclay**: “Seldom did Paul write so difficult and so complicated a passage.”¹
- **C. H. Dodd**: “The illustration...is confused from the outset...Paul...lacks the gift for sustained illustration of ideas through concrete images....It is probably a defect of imagination. We cannot help contrasting his laboured and blundering allegories with the masterly parables of Jesus...Paul flounders among the images he has tied to evoke. We are relieved when he tires of his unmanageable puppets, and talks about real things.”²
- Romans 6 & 7 is a parenthesis in a larger segment embracing chapters 5-8.
- **Moo**: “The main topic is the Mosaic law...using the analogy of marriage, Paul argues that a person’s bondage to the law must be severed in order that he or she may be put into a new relationship with Christ (7:1-6). This, the ‘positive’ teaching of the chapter, gives rise to question about the origin and nature of the law. These Paul...shows that the law is from God, but that it has nevertheless become the unwitting stool of sin...Despite its divine origin, the law can neither justify nor sanctify.”³
- Here is the problem: We live in a day when people have little concern for law, in fact, when most people try as hard as they can or do to be lawless. So how do we say to people who do not care about the law that the law is important? Or, harder yet, how do you tell them that

¹ William Barclay, *The Letter to the Romans* in “*The Daily Study Bible*” series (Edinburgh: Saint Andrews Press, 1978), p. 218.

² C. H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1960), pp. 100-01.

³ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 409.

they must be freed from law in order to live for righteousness (which is what Romans 7:1-6 says), when they are already acting as if they are freed from it—but in the wrong way?⁴

¹Do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to men who know the law

- The ‘Law’ that Paul has in view here is the Mosaic law.⁵
- However, even in a more general sense it can be seen that ‘law’ is recognized by all and that all naturally see the binding nature of ‘law.’
- **Lewis:** “Every one has heard people quarrelling. Sometimes it sounds funny and sometimes it sounds merely unpleasant; but however it sounds, I believe we can learn something very important from listening to the kind of things they say. They say things like this: 'How'd you like it if anyone did the same to you?' – 'That's my seat, I was there first' – 'Leave him alone, he isn't doing you any harm' – 'Why should you shove in first?' – 'Give me a bit of your orange, I gave you a bit of mine' – 'Come on, you promised.' People say things like that every day, educated people as well as uneducated, and children as well as grown-ups. Now what interests me about all these remarks is that the man who makes them is not merely saying that the other man's behaviour does not happen to please him. He is appealing to some kind of standard of behaviour which he expects the other man to know about. And the other man very seldom replies: 'To hell with your standard.' Nearly always he tries to make out that what he has been doing does not really go against the standard, or that if it does there is some special excuse. He pretends there is some special reason in this particular case why the person who took the seat first should not keep it, or that things were quite different when he was given the bit of orange, or that something has turned up which lets him off keeping his promise. It looks, in fact, very much as if both parties had in mind some kind of Law or Rule of fair play or decent behaviour or morality or whatever you like to call it, about which they really agreed. And they have. If they had not, they might, of course, fight like animals, but they could not quarrel in the human sense of the word. Quarrelling means trying to show that the other man is in the wrong. And there would be no sense in trying to do that unless you and he had some sort of agreement as to what Right and Wrong are; just as there would be no sense in saying that a footballer had committed a foul unless there was some agreement about the rules of football.”⁶

–that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives?

- Paul assumes certain things about his readers...that they know the law.
 - Question: is his audience Jewish or Gentile? Answer: Gentile (see verse 1:13)
 - In verse 2 Paul introduces an illustration for the purpose of simplifying something difficult.
 - Unfortunately, this illustration which was designed to simplify, has brought about much confusion and a great deal of stumbling over the centuries.

²For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. ³So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband

⁴ These questions were taken, with very few changes, from James Montgomery Boice, *Romans, An Expository Commentary*, 4 volumes (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), vol. 2, p. 717.

⁵ For a defense of this position please see Douglas Moo in *Five Views on Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996). His essay on a modified Lutheran view is particularly helpful, as are his critiques of the opposing views.

⁶ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1960), pp. 3-4.

dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man.

- Some people read in the text this idea: once we were bound to the law, but now the law is dead and so it is utterly irrelevant to the Christian life.
 - This analogy becomes a proof-text to support the spirit of Antinomianism
 - Problem with the illustration: The law didn't die, I did
 - Because my old self is dead my relationship to the law is broken
 - Paul says in verse 1, "the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives".
 - Notice no as long as the law lives, but the man.
 - The destructive fruit that the law elicited within us, inciting us to sin, has died.
 - However, although we have been made alive in our inward man, we do still have a relationship to the law,
 - (Albeit radically different from former)
 - What the law failed to elicit from us, Christ wants to see born through our relationship to him.
 - So justification by faith and living under grace is never a license to sin
 - We are encouraged by our new status
 - Paul is now going to set a contrast before us, looking from a slightly different angle at what it means to be alive in the flesh as opposed to being alive in the spirit.

⁴So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ,

- The contrast is clear: The Law binds her, death frees her.
- *Morris*: "The apostle is saying that the woman's status as a wife has been abolished, completely done away. She is no longer a wife."⁷

that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead,

- *Carson*: "For Paul, the commands of God that he finds operative for the Christian cannot be equated with the Mosaic code."⁸
- Paul is more than happy to live under the stipulations of the law covenant and not be unnecessarily offensive to them, but he insists that the law covenant no longer binds him. It cannot, he is under a new covenant.
- There are, however, certain constraints beyond which he cannot go.
 - He is *not* infinitely flexible; he is not 'free from God's law.'
 - He is not free from God's demands, God's requirements; he is under Christ's law
 - *Carson*: "The heart of the idea is clear enough. All of God's demand upon him is mediated through Christ. Whatever God demands of him as a new-covenant believer, a Christian, binds him; he cannot step outside those constraints."⁹
- The obvious question: How is Christ's law (which binds Paul) related to the Mosaic law covenant?

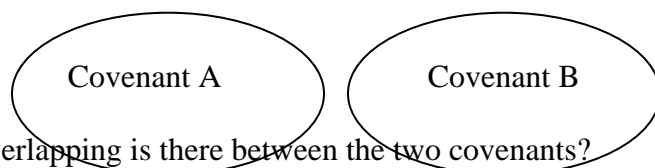
Covenant A

Covenant B

⁷ Leon Morris, *The Expositors Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), p. 271.

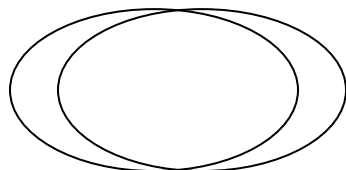
⁸ Carson, p. 119.

⁹ Carson, p. 120.

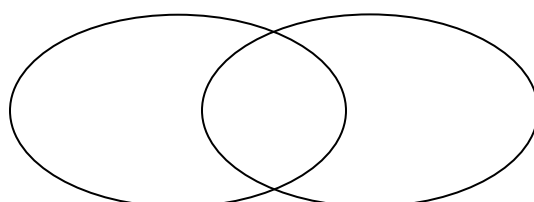


How much overlapping is there between the two covenants?

A lot?



Little or None?



Covenant A **Covenant B**
Law of Moses **Law of Christ**

- Paul characterizes his position in Christ as ‘free’, but it is freedom for a purpose
- Paul can be extraordinarily flexible wherever the law of God, mediated through Christ, does not impinge upon him.
- **Bruce:** “If Paul felt no longer any necessity to comply with Jewish regulations and ceremonies as matters of divine obligation, he did not go to the other extreme and regard these things as forbidden to a Christian; henceforth they ranked as morally and religiously indifferent things, to be observed or not as occasion might indicate.”¹⁰
- **Galatians 3: 23-25**—“Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.”

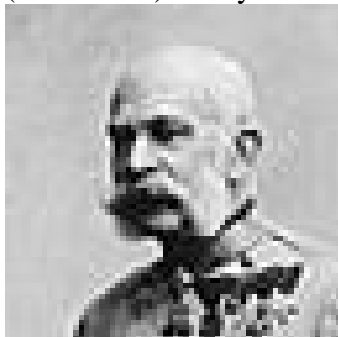
in order that we might bear fruit to God.

- **Boice:** “It is the fruitfulness of the Christian, rather even than his union with Christ, that is emphasized...Paul has been teaching that, having been saved by God, we must live a holy life. Now, by the image of a fruitful marriage, he teaches that this has been God’s object in saving us all along.”¹¹
- Summary: **Galatians 5:13-14**—“For you were called to freedom, brothers, only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love becomes slaves to one another.”
- Have you noticed how people are often very proud of their names/heritage?

¹⁰ F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (The New Century Bible Commentaries, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans and Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1971), pp. 86f.

¹¹ Boice, p. 725.

- Some people belong to (come from) families with ancestors who came to this country on the Mayflower. They are, rightly, proud of such a heritage.
- Trish: Ben Franklin, the Captain of the Mayflower
- Me: Nobody...people that live in trailer parks, etc.
 - Until a phone call from my brother last Summer: We are descendants of Franz Joseph, the Emperor of Hungary/Austria. (1830-1916), emperor of Austria (1848-1916)—67 years and king of Hungary (1867-1916).



- None of these histories can “compare with the pride that should be ours as the bride of Jesus Christ.”¹²

⁵For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death. ⁶But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: “If the expression ‘But now’ does not move you, I take leave to query whether you are a Christian.”¹³

so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.

- ‘Sinful Nature’ or ‘Flesh’ describes our total nature under the domination to sin.
- *Achtemeier:* “‘Flesh’ and ‘Spirit’ refer not to two parts of our nature but rather to two way s of carrying out or total existence, and knowing that the contrast between ‘letter’ and ‘Spirit’ points to two kinds of relationship to God, will help us in understanding the way Paul carries on his discussion.”¹⁴
- When we were in the flesh the desires of sin were activated by the very presence of the law.
 - Now we are delivered form the law.
- “If we have been saved by God through the work of Jesus Christ, we must (and will) live differently. We must bear fruit to God. Christians do bear fruit to God regardless of whether or not they are doing it in precisely the way you and I are doing it.
- *Ills.:* Donald Grey Barnhouse. He was at a luncheon of ministers, and one of them remarked on the frigidity of a certain denomination. He was bothered by how little its ministers seemed to accomplish. Barnhouse replied by probing the thoughts of the others a bit further. He told of a scholar in the denomination who went through theological seminary and was ordained. But he seldom preached. In fact, he never went to a prayer meeting and even absented himself from church for many weeks at a time. He was really a bookworm and spent his days

¹² Boice, p. 726.

¹³ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapters 7:1-8:4, The Law: Its Functions and Limits* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), p. 83.

¹⁴ Paul Achtemeier, *Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: Romans* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1985), pp. 116-17.

in the library. Even worse, he was intemperate in certain of his personal habits. The man lived this way for more than twenty years. * “What is your opinion of such a minister?” Barnhouse asked. * The others agreed that a man like that was no credit to the ministry. * The conversation took another turn, and Barnhouse asked what study helps these ministers used in sermon preparation, especially what they considered to be the most helpful concordance. They were unanimous in preferring Strong’s concordance. They seemed to prefer Strong’s for its Hebrew and Greek helps and for its comparative word lists. It saved them hours of work each week and was, they agreed, their most valuable tool. * “The man whom you said was no credit to the ministry was James Strong, the author of the concordance you all find so valuable,” said Barnhouse.¹⁵

- God does not give his children identical jobs to do.
 - **Barnhouse:** “The most forlorn Christian in the most humble surroundings, living in penury on the lowest cultural scale, is serving a purpose in the divine plan. The convert from a savage tribe, the professor in his study, the flighty young girl—all are serving the Lord. We must not be satisfied with the way we are serving him, but we must be satisfied with the place where God has put us. He wants you exactly where you are today.”¹⁶

⁷What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, “Do not covet.”⁸But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire.

- **Lloyd-Jones:** “To teach morality may be a positive danger, for it tends to inflame the passions; it encourages them...A minister of religion once told me that the book that had done him the greatest amount of harm in his own personal life a book entitled *The Mastery of Sex* (i.e., how to overcome the temptation of sex). Avoid such books, for they will do more harm than good. The reason is that ‘the motions of sins’ are actually inflamed even by the Law of God. The very law that prohibits them encourages us to do them, because *we* are impure. So morality teaching can even be a positive danger. By teaching children about sex, and by warning them against the consequences of certain actions, what you are really doing is to introduce them to the whole subject. Naturally they will greatly enjoy it, their curiosity will be aroused, and they will desire to read further.”¹⁷

For apart from law, sin is dead.

- If we have no standard of righteousness enabling us to differentiate between good and evil, how do we determine what is right and wrong?
 - Without law there is not sin; without commandments there can be no transgression.
 - Sin defined: “any want of conformity to, or transgression of, the law.
 - Sin by definition depends on some kind of standard
 - It’s not that there would have been nothing evil without a law, but we would never have known what sin was.

¹⁵ Donald Grey Barnhouse, *God’s Freedom: Exposition of Bible Doctrines, Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure*, vol. 6, Romans 6:1-7:25 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 217-18, as quoted in Boice, 737-8.

¹⁶ Donald Grey Barnhouse, *God’s Freedom: Exposition of Bible Doctrines, Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure*, vol. 6, Romans 6:1-7:25 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), pp. 217-18.

¹⁷ Lloyd-Jones, pp. 80-81.

means! But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.

Summary thoughts:

- Chapter 7 is talking about the Law.
- We have been released from the Law so that we may serve Christ without hindrance.
- Bearing fruit to God is the goal of being released from the Law.
- Thought: if you do not bear fruit to God, you are still under Law.
- Not everyone's work (i.e., fruit bearing) is the same. Concern yourself with your own fruit bearing, not someone else's.
 - Avoid judgmentalism: *Ills.*: Receiving a call from a woman who was very upset that a friend would not take her call late at night... "When she can't take a call at 10:30 PM she's become too soft."
 - This woman's friend had three children that she was responsible for.
- Sin is the culprit, not the Law. Sin produced death in me, not the Law (the Law is good). The Law demonstrates just how awful sin really is. But the way of breaking free from this vicious cycle (i.e., law inspires sin, we sin, the law condemns us; law inspires sin, we sin, the law condemns us; law inspires sin, we sin, the law condemns us; etc.) is not by focusing on the Law, but by focusing on our union with Christ. We died to sin, we died to the Law, that we might bear fruit to God.
 - *Ills.*: How do you fix selfishness? By focusing on it? No; by focusing on the gospel—your union with Christ.