

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? 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.

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. 5 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. 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.

I want to start with a little Bible trivia this morning. How does the Old Testament begin? This one's pretty easy. *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.* OK, that was maybe too easy. A here's a slightly harder question. How does the New Testament end?

20 He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.

OK, how does the Old Testament end? What are the closing verses? If you guessed it ended with the prophet Elijah, you were right.

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. 6 And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction."

The last verses are 5-6 but the very last command in the Old Testament is right before that in verse four.

“Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel.

It makes sense that since the Old Testament was founded upon the law of Moses that it would end with a command to continue to follow the law of Moses. But we need to reconcile this command with Paul's statement in verse four that believers *have died to the law through the body of Christ*. How is it that we are to obey the law yet we have also died to the law? And more importantly, how does this relate to the daily grind of life?

What I think Paul is developing here is what we could call our identity in Christ. Nowadays, when you hear the word identity it is typically used in a sentence like, "You need be very careful to protect yourself against identity theft." Now if someone got a hold of your personal data and "stole your identity," would they actually possess your identity? Obviously, such a thing would wreak havoc in your life and there's no doubt that they would have a part of you. But they would not have YOU. To steal your identity they would have to steal your soul. And believe me, if someone could figure out how to do that, they probably would.

But your identity is much more than just your social security number and bank account numbers. Your identity is *you*. But no man or woman or child is an island are we are typically identified by what we do, what we are in to. If you are Olympian Shaun White, you are a snowboarder. He snowboards. Snowboarding is his identity. It's what he loves to, what he has done for so long, better than anyone else in the world. It's his job, his recreation, his business life, his social circle. I mean the dude got his first professional endorsement at age seven! Now that he might be retiring, he might be taking on a slightly different identity, but he will always be Shaun White the snowboarder.

What's your identity? Are you defined by your hobbies? Are you defined by your family or your kids, or by the kind of work that you do? As adults we eventually settle into some kind of identity. You may wish it were somewhat different, but the basic you is pretty much set in stone. But children, teens and young people have not yet settled into an identity. They are, as the old saying goes, "looking for themselves." Part of growing up is the never ending struggle to fit in somewhere. Will you tend to excel in academics, sports, fine arts or some other part of life?

Do you realize that this seeking of an identity is really seeking after relationships? When you seek to excel at something, a large part of you wants to excel so that others will think about you in a certain way. If you excel at sports, you will be the kid who is into sports. People will identify you in that way and your relationships will be formed, at least partly, around what you do. You want to, actually you need to belong somewhere. People join gangs so they can belong. Others seek one relationship after another hoping to find someone to whom they can belong. This process of seeking your identity and belonging is a good and normal thing, but what matters is where you look.

I want to show you why we need to find our identity in Jesus Christ. And this is what Paul is driving at in verse four. *Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another*. I believe that last phrase is the key to understanding

these six verses: so that you belong to Christ. There's your sense of belonging. There's your identity. As believers, you and I belong to Jesus Christ. Let me show you how we go there and why it is so vitally important.

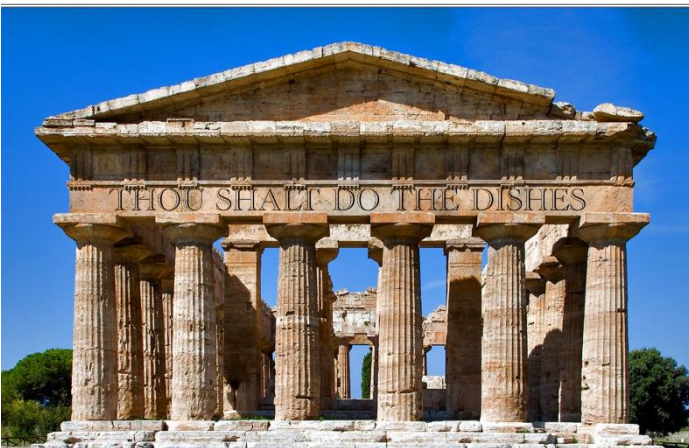
What does it mean that we belong to Christ?

1. We are dead to the law.

In chapter six we saw that we have died with Christ and therefore have also died to sin. Sin no longer has dominion over us. Remember last week--we are to consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to Christ. We will never be free from sin's tyranny without this first step.

But now we have a slightly new idea in chapter 7--we have died to the law. Is dying to the law the same as dying to sin? And as I asked before, why would the Old Testament end with a command to obey the law of Moses if God intended to do away with the law in essentially the first chapter of the New Testament?

Let's answer the second question first--how can we be dead to the law and yet still obey the law? The key is that we have died to the law through the body of Christ. The law requires that we live a perfectly righteous life, but is that even possible? Not for us, it isn't, but for Christ it was. He was the fulfillment of the law, as it says in Romans 10:4. *For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.* The word end is important. It means finished or complete. What did Jesus say just before he died? "It is finished" (John 19:30). Some of you know the word *tetelestai*--it is finished. It has ended. That's the same word in Romans 10:4. Christ is the end of the law, or we could say Christ is the completion of the law of the finishing of the law. Because of his sinless, perfect obedience to the law, he did what we could not do. And then, we literally were buried with Christ and raised from the dead. The last command of the Old Testament in the last chapter of the Old Testament was completed by the one whose birth was announced in the first chapter of the New Testament. It's like God said, you need to keep the law and you can't, but here's One who can.



Like all teens, our kids have certain chores to accomplish, among them is doing the dishes. You could say that Karen and I have a law for our children--the dishes must be done. This is the law of the Medes and Persians that cannot be revoked--the dishes must be washed and put away. This is our law. As a matter of fact, three years ago archeologists uncovered this ancient Persian temple with this very law engraved on the front. And it just so happens it was written in King James English!

Now let's say it's Kellyn's turn to do the dishes but she was gone all day and then was planning to spend the night at a friend's house. Has the law of the Medes and Persians changed? Do the

dishes wash themselves? No, the dishes must be done! But Kellyn is literally not able to do the dishes. So either we conscript another slave, I mean child, in the house to do the dishes or else we roll up our sleeves and do the dirty deed ourselves. But either way, the law stands--the dishes must be done. Since Kellyn was not able to do the dishes and were therefore done by someone else, she died to the law of doing the dishes. The law was fulfilled by someone else so it would no longer have jurisdiction over her.

Paul used the illustration of marriage to explain this reality to us.

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.

Death, in this case, the death of a spouse, kills the law governing the marriage. If her husband dies, the wife is released from the law. Even though her husband was the one who died, she is the one who died to the law for it no longer has jurisdiction over her.

What happened to Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold after the Columbine shooting? The tragic story is that they took the lives of 13 people and then killed themselves. Did the two shooters ever face a criminal trial? Were they ever convicted of multiple counts of first degree murder? The evidence convicted them and in the court of public opinion, they were as guilty as could be, but they were never officially put on trial. Why? Because they were dead, which also meant that they were dead to the law. The laws of the State of Colorado no longer had jurisdiction over them.

Now there might be an extremely rare case of a posthumous trial, but those are the exception. Joan of Arc was one such exception. She was put on trial for heresy, convicted and burned at the stake. Twenty five years after her death, the church held a posthumous trial and Joan of Arc was found innocent of the former charge of heresy and officially labeled as a martyr. In this case, the posthumous trial changed Catholic law and rewrote history for Joan of Arc's legacy, but it did not actually benefit her at all, because she was already dead--dead to the law.

4 Likewise, my brothers, as Paul wrote in verse four, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ. We are dead to the law just as surely as Joan of Arc was dead to the law, as the woman whose husband had died was dead to the law. The law no longer has jurisdiction over us because it was completed in and through Jesus Christ. Why? What was the purpose of this killing and fulfilling of the law? So that you may belong to another. The word belong is the important word in this phrase. If you have a King James Bible in front of you, it reads, that ye should be married to another. No other translations have the word "marry" in this verse, but it certainly can carry that meaning.

The word belong does not mean ownership, as in, the house on S3712 Woodland Rd. belongs to the Maurers. We own the house so it belongs to us. You could say that Jesus owns, because we were "bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6:20). Jesus owns us and we are slaves of Christ, but this word belong is much more than mere ownership. It is a statement of being.

The famous opening of the gospel of John has this word. "All things **came into being** through Him, and apart from Him nothing **came into being** that has **come into being**" (John 1:3).

The phrase "came into being" is the same word translated as "belong." When we died to the law, in a real sense, we came into being, didn't we. We were dead and now we are alive. But we did not merely come into being or just belong. We belong to someone-- *to him who has been raised from the dead*. We "came into being" to Christ or in Christ. We belong to Christ. Our existence is in Christ. What's another word we could use here? How about identity? Our identity is in Christ. Apart from Christ we have no real identity.

In the evangelical church, we hear so much about salvation that we can begin to de-personalize it. We have studied at great length words like justification, propitiation and atonement. We need to know these words and I have no regrets for spending time on them. But we can begin to see salvation as a largely impersonal matter. We were destined for Hell but through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus, by his superabundant grace, we are now destined for Heaven. We were in the miry clay and now our feet are set on a rock. We were in the kingdom of darkness and now we are in the kingdom of light. We were in one place and now we are in a much better place.

These things are all true but can you see how we can start to make our wonderful salvation into an impersonal event? Salvation is not just going from one place to another, but from one person to another. As unbelievers, Satan was our father and master. We belonged to the devil. Our existence was in him. But when Christ redeemed us, he did it so that we would belong to him. Salvation is ultimately going from one relationship to another.

Let me try to explain the level of intimacy in this relationship by using the Song of Solomon. Through the centuries, church fathers have interpreted the Song of Solomon in an allegorical or symbolic way. The relationship between King Solomon and his bride was interpreted as the relationship between Yahweh and Israel. Almost no one interpreted it as a historical love story between a husband and his wife. The whole thing is a bit risqué so they shied away from a literal interpretation. I agree that the book is about King Solomon and his wife. It contains the preparation for their wedding, their wedding celebration, the honeymoon and the early years of marriage. This is not allegory or symbolism. However, there are principles that we can draw from it which do relate perfectly to our relationship with the Lord.

Chief among them is the progression that his wife, the Shulammitte experiences throughout the book. Before they are married, this is how she described Solomon. "My beloved is mine, and I am his" (2:16). She obviously loves him and is eager to become his wife, but notice the possessive nature of her description. "My beloved is mine." Her primary thought is that he belongs to her. That he is going to become her husband. Her secondary thought is the fact she belongs to him--"I am his."

Sometime after the wedding, she flipped this exact phrase on its head and declared "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine" (6:3). Now her primary thought is that she belongs to him and her secondary impression is that he belongs to her. Finally, the progression in the relationship arrives at what I think is the full level of intimacy, and I don't mean physical

intimacy. "I belong to my beloved, and his desire is for me" (7:10). Do you see how intimate and personal this is? This dark-skinned, foreign woman, who could hardly believe she was going to be the queen of Israel, near the end of the book can declare that "I belong to my beloved, and his desire is for me." Now Solomon could probably say the same thing about her, but we are focusing on her progression. She is not even thinking about her love for him at that point because she is so lost in his love for her. "I belong to him and his desire is for me."

Are you lost in the love of Christ? Not lost in the love you have for him, though that is important, but I mean are you lost in his love for you? Could you say this phrase? "I belong to Jesus Christ and his desire is for me." Do you see your relationship with him in these terms?

Now if you are not careful, this could sound like we are the most important thing in universe. God desires us because, of course, we are inherently so desirable. No-he desires us, he is jealous for us, because he is so awesome. He does not want us to settle for something less than him because he is the greatest thing that he could give us.

This past week I heard a preacher on the radio explain the meaning of two parables-the "pearl of great price" and the hidden treasure in the field. His pinch line was, "Do you know what the pearl of great price is? It is you! You are what God has been seeking!" I thought to myself, ugh, no! You've got it all backwards. The pearl of great price and the treasure in the field is the gospel, it is Jesus himself. The fact that we belong to God and his desire is for us does not make us special, it makes him great.

Remember that the King James says that we died to the law so that we would be married to Jesus. Does this sound right to you--that we are married to Jesus? Isn't that what Ephesians chapter five is all about?

We are the bride of Christ.

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

Now you might object and say, "Well that's talking about the universal church. The bride of Christ is the entire church throughout the world and throughout the centuries, that's not talking about me." So I would ask, are you part of the church or not? If you are born again, then you are part of the church and if you are part of the church, then you are the bride of Christ. You belong to him and his desire is for you.

Now I want to give several things that are true because we belong to Christ.

1. We will bear fruit for God.

Notice the two purpose clauses in verse four. *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 have died to the law...

*so that you may belong to another
in order that we may bear fruit for God*

Do you belong to Christ? Why? Because through Christ we have died to the law. This was God's purpose and we have established this as a certainty. You belong to Christ but do you bear fruit for God? You might be thinking, "Well that depends on the day." In other words, is bearing fruit for God guaranteed in the same way that we belong to Christ? Our first answer might be to say "I don't think so." After all, bearing spiritual fruit is a matter of one's spiritual maturity, isn't it? The more spiritually mature I am the more fruit I will bear, correct? This is true but if we are not careful, we will miss a great promise here.

I believe that we are guaranteed to bear fruit for God with just as much certainty as the fact that we belong to Christ. I think this is true not just from this verse but also from John 15. Jesus said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5) Now who bears fruit in this passage? The one who abides in Christ, right? But who is it that abides in Christ? ALL believers abide in Christ because the ones who do not bear fruit "are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned." So the fact is that there is no such thing as a Christian who does not bear fruit, because if you never bear fruit, you are not a Christian. So when Paul said that we belong to Christ in order to bear fruit for God, this means that since we belong to Christ, we will bear fruit for God.

Have you ever thought of yourself in this way? I am a fruit-bearing Christian. I am bearing fruit for God. My life matters because I am abiding in Christ and bearing fruit for the Lord. Now I think it is true that we all bear different amounts and different types of fruit, but we all bear fruit for God. Isn't that a great promise?

2. Our full identity will be in him. We will love him because he first loved us. We will come to experience the fact that he did not merely die for us--in our place, but that he died for us--so that we would belong to him. What is your identity? Don't just say "I am a Christian." That is merely a rough description of your identity. Instead, say "I belong to Jesus." That doesn't make me great, that makes HIM great!

4. We will realize our full unity in Christ

In a few minutes, we will share together in the Lord's Supper. Jesus said to do this "in remembrance of him," but what exactly are we supposed to remember? You know, Jesus never spelled that out, did he? He did not give us a list, short or long, about what precisely we are supposed to remember. I take that to mean that we are supposed to remember *all* of it. And certainly included in that would be the fact that we belong to Jesus. I confess that I have never approached the communion table with this thought in mind but I would encourage you to do that this morning.

Each of us belongs to Jesus. No one belongs to him any more than anyone else. There are no second cousins to Jesus. We all equally belong. This means that we are already in complete unity. It may not feel that way, but it doesn't change the fact that it is true.

This is why Paul warned the church in Corinth so bluntly about their love feasts. Their disregard for one another proved that they failed to understand that each one fully belonged to Jesus. People were falling asleep and even dying, not just because they were sinning, but because they were failing to live out the reality and beauty of perfect unity.

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