

Freedom

*Way down yonder in the graveyard walk
I thank God I'm free at last
Me and my Jesus going to meet and talk
I thank God I'm free at last*
African-American Spiritual

There is no better place for us to meet Jesus than when we find ourselves “in the graveyard walk.” When we are bound by sin - the condition that draws us inexorably to death, to eternal separation from God – we face an utter inability to make it on our own. The weight of the law, the burden of expectations that we can never meet, is greater than any person can carry.

That is when Jesus frees us, calls us to himself. We still experience a death, but as Paul tells us in this week’s passage, it is a welcome death. We die to the power of sin, which in turn frees us from the reign of the law. Jesus offers a different way, the way of the Spirit, free to serve our God. We can join in the joyful shout, “I thank God I’m free at last.”

Monday – Under Authority

1. Please read Romans 7:1-6. What did Paul assume about his readers in verse 1?

Text insight: The “men who know the law” were Jewish Christians. Paul counted on their familiarity with Old Testament laws - such as the Ten Commandments – which governed all aspects of Jewish life, both spiritual and worldly.

2. Luke 7:1-12 gives us an understanding of both earthly and spiritual authority. What insight did the centurion display (a centurion was a Roman officer similar to an army captain today)? How do you think the people in the crowd felt when they heard Jesus praise this foreigner? What does this passage tell you about authority and faith?

Digging Deeper – If we are no longer under the authority of the law, who or what authority are we now under?

Tuesday – ‘til Death do us Part’

“Marrying for love may be a bit risky, but it is so honest that God can't help but smile on it.” Josh Billings, 19th century American humorist

1. Please read Romans 7:1-6 (focusing on verse 2). What event released a woman from the law of marriage?
2. Ruth 1:1-18 reveals both the letter of the law and the spirit. Though Ruth was released from the law of marriage, she chose to yield to a different law – the royal law of love (see James 2:8). What does this story tell you about the royal law of love?

Making it Personal: Ruth made a choice no one expected her to make. Have you ever known someone who made a choice similar to Ruth’s? What do you admire about that decision?

Wednesday – Bearing Fruit

“At least eight times in the New Testament we are told to “make every effort” in our growth toward becoming like Jesus. You don't just sit around and wait for it to happen.” Rick Warren – The Purpose Driven Life

1. Please read Romans 7:1-6 (focusing on verses 4-5). What are the two ways your life can bear fruit?
2. What does it look like to bear fruit for death? What does it look like to bear fruit to God?
3. What does it take to live a life that bears Godly fruit? For further help, read John 15:1-8.

Thursday – Which Fruit?

“One is wise to cultivate the tree that bears fruit in our soul.” Henry David Thoreau

1. Read Romans 7:4-5 and Galatians 5:16-22. Galatians 5 offers a good comparison tool for us to tell whether we bear fruit for death or for God. Which characteristics from each list apply to you?
2. Does Galatians 5:18 support Romans 7:4? In what way?

Prayer focus: Consider the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23, and thank God that there is no spiritual law standing against these things. Ask him to grow this fruit in your life, with a more abundant crop each day.

Friday – Free to Serve

“The high destiny of the individual is to serve rather than to rule.” Albert Einstein

1. Please read Romans 7:6. What benefit flows from being released from the law?

Text insight: Jews of that day typically felt the burden of the law, seeing strict adherence to each major statute and minor rule as a requirement for pleasing God; miss one, and you’ve missed them all. To be released from the law meant there was a new way to have a relationship with God.

2. Serving “in the new way of the Spirit” sounds mysterious, like something we will never fully understand. But Paul touches upon it again later in Romans 8:26 and 12:1. As you consider these verses, what do you think it means to make a sacrifice of your life, led by the Holy Spirit who acts on your behalf?

Making it Personal: How can you live a life of service, a sacrifice to God?

For the Weekend: Compare Romans 7:1-6 with Galatians 5:16-26. Why do you think Paul felt it necessary to include the warning in Galatians 5:26? Is it an appropriate warning for you in your spiritual service to God? Read John 15:1-8, paying close attention to Jesus’ words about fruit-bearing.