

The Death Clause

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[0:00] Thank you to the young people for that awesome sermon. I don't have to preach a whole lot because you guys already did a bunch.

! So that was great. Thank you for that. I feel like between y'all and Jared, we pretty much went to camp with you. That was pretty cool. Turn in your Bibles, if you would, to Romans chapter 7. We have been in our study of Romans, but I need to pause for a minute and talk about referees. Because, look, they're a problem, okay? And I know we have referees in the room with us right now. Matt Murphy has the ability to mute my microphone right now, and he's a referee.

Billy Carlton. Who else has done officiating in game? Yep, Al Benzing. There you go. Wade. What do you officiate, Wade? Kindergarten football, yeah.

That's about your speed. I mean, that's about your speed. No, look. Officiating referees, they're an essential part of sporting activity.

[1:07] But when the game becomes about them, it's a problem, all right? How many of you have watched a sporting event, either live or online? We don't need to talk about the last playoffs that the Henrietta Bearcats went to.

And, yeah. I mean, that whole thing made national news. Anyway, fortunately, some referees lost their jobs over that, which, you know, look, they brought it on themselves.

All right. Here's the deal. When you start making it about you and you're kind of inserting yourself into the game and just calling every little thing that you could possibly call, it's like, look, this ain't fun for anybody, okay?

Let them play a little bit, right? Have you ever yelled at the television, let them play? Now, that's usually when they're calling it on your team. When they're not calling it for your team, it's like, why didn't you call that?

The whistle on the field, it might be technically correct according to the rule book, but it can often make the whole experience miserable for everyone.

[2:07] Have you ever felt like your spiritual life is being officiated by an overzealous referee? Every single time you take a step, a whistle blows in your conscience or somebody calls attention to the fact you didn't pray long enough today, you didn't read enough chapters of the Bible, you had a bad thought, you were selfish, you missed an opportunity.

It's like every time you turn around, you're breaking a rule. It's exhausting to live that way. It's exhausting to live walking through eggshells, running on empty, waiting for the next flag to be thrown on your life.

Over the last two weeks, we went through Romans chapter 8. We started several weeks ago at the end of Paul's letter to the Romans, and we're working our way from back to front just to be different this time.

We went through Romans 8. We rejoice together with Paul that there's no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. But today we're going into Romans chapter 7, and Paul shows us exactly how Jesus got that referee off our backs, so to speak.

Got him to swallow his whistle, if you know what that means. It all comes down to the legal reality we're going to call the death clause. Can you all say that with me?

[3:36] The death clause. In case you missed it, it was the death clause. There you go. Paul's message to us today from Romans 7 is a life-giving message.

You have been completely released from the weight of the old contract that you were bound by. You have been released and now belong to a living Savior instead.

Romans chapter 7. We're going to read the first six verses. If you're there, would you mind standing with me just for this initial reading of the Scriptures? Romans 7, verse 1.

We've been in Romans for several weeks in our study, When in Romans. We're going to pick this up in Romans chapter 7 and verse 1.

Now, dear brothers and sisters, you who are familiar with the law, don't you know that the law, the rule book, applies only while a person is living? Well, yeah, it doesn't apply to dead people, right? [4:39] Verse 2. For example, when a woman marries, the law binds her to her husband as long as he is alive. But if he dies, till death do us part, the laws of marriage no longer apply to her.

So while her husband's alive, she would be committing adultery if she went and married another man. But if her husband dies, she's free from that law and does not commit adultery when she remarries.

Verse 4. So, my dear brothers and sisters, this is the point. I always love it when the Bible—just look up here for a second. Don't you love it when the Bible actually says this is the point?

Sometimes we're trying to figure out the point, and Paul actually is nice enough to say, here's the point.

You died to the power of the law when you died with Christ. And now you are united with the one who was raised from the dead.

As a result, we can produce a harvest of good deeds for God. When we were controlled by our old nature, sinful desires were at work within us. Man, the young people just talked about this.

[5:43] And the law aroused these evil desires that produced a harvest of sinful deeds, resulting in a different kind of death. But now we have been released from the law, for we died to it, and are no longer captive to the law's power.

Now we can serve God. Not in the old way of obeying the letter of the law, but in the new way of living in the Spirit. God, eliminate our minds from your word, by your Spirit, that we can understand what Paul was writing.

Shine your light in. We can see the liberty we have in you. It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. You can be seated. Thanks for standing. Point number one in the death clause is escaping the old relationship.

Paul talks about that, especially these first three verses that we just read. So number one, when we study this death clause that Paul's using as an illustration to describe our freedom from the law, is escaping the old relationship.

Paul begins in verses 1 through 3 by referring to a legal principle that everybody understands. If you've got half a brain, you understand, even with just that half, that marital contracts are only good if one of, or both parties are alive.

[6:58] If one of them dies, everybody says it when they get married, till death do us part, right? Then that covenant is no longer binding if one of the spouses dies.

If a spouse walks away in these days, these ancient days, with both parties still alive, then that marital contract is still binding.

The legal obligation remains. But when death enters the picture, everything changes. This is why we're calling this the death clause.

Because the moment death occurs, all previous agreements are null and void. Contract is over. You're under no more obligation.

The surviving party is entirely legally free. So why is Paul talking about this? Because he wants us to understand what our relationship to God looked like before we met Jesus.

[8:04] Before Christ, our primary obligation was to sin and death because of the law. God put his law down, said this is the rule book you have to live by.

If you break this law, you are under obligation to your owner. We were owned by sin and death. Belong to the powers of darkness.

Until Christ, by his death and resurrection, set us free. So, let's be clear. God's law was not the problem. Our sin was the problem.

The fact that we were in bondage to sin was the problem. We could never abide by the law. God's law was perfect. But we couldn't abide by it. It was holy.

It was right. But the law was an incredibly demanding partner. An incredibly demanding spouse. You think your spouse gives you problems.

[9:05] That's nothing compared to the law. The law of God. Make your life miserable. Because you can't ever live up to it. You can't ever live up to the standard.

That's why we read in Romans chapter 3. We'll get to in a few weeks. The wages of sin is death. All have sinned.

All have come short of the glory of God. None of us live up to that standard. We've all fallen short of it. We've all fallen short of it. So, the referee standing there with his whistle in his mouth, getting ready to throw the flag every time you break God's law.

And we break it constantly. If not by our actions, then by our words. If not by our words, then by our thoughts.

If not even by our thoughts, then by our instincts. We're constantly going against God's law. We're constantly going the wrong way. None of us can ever live up to that.

[10:09] We always fall short. So, the referee is standing there saying, do this perfectly. You've got to abide by the rules of the game. You've got to follow the rules perfectly, and you'll live.

But if you fail in any tiny area, I'm throwing the flag. You break the contract. Paul wrote in Galatians chapter 3 and verse 10, all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse.

You're cursed. I'm cursed. Until Jesus breaks the curse. Cursed is everyone, it was written, who does not continue to do everything written in the book of the law.

You've got to do it all. Say, man, I'm about 90% there. There's about 10% of it I struggle with, but I'm about 90% there. You might as well be 90% wrong.

Because if you break it in one tiny area, you've broken it all. That's the bad news that Jesus had to drop on a Pharisee one time who said, I've kept it all. He said, no, you haven't.

[11:13] If you fail in the smallest area, you've failed in all of it. So, there is a way to escape the old relationship.

Because you need an escape. Nobody can live that way. It's oppressive. It's miserable. And that's the religion that Jesus came down to free us from.

Bondage to sin because we can't keep the law. The only way we could be free was to be perfect. None of us can achieve that.

So, Jesus had another way to free us. Under human power, there was no way out of our contract. It held authority over us unless a death clause was triggered.

We would have to die. Well, Jesus came down and said, how about I die in your place? How about I die for you?

[12:13] And that leads us to number two, the radical release of the cross. This is what the cross meant. Everybody knew when they came in here this morning that Jesus died on the cross.

We could have taken a poll, and I'm confident we would have gotten 100 out of 100 responses that say, Yes, I know that Jesus died on the cross. And I bet you just about every one of them, if not every one of them, would say, I believe he rose from the dead.

So, I think the vast majority of you this morning are in agreement on these things. And if you're not, I'd love to have a conversation with you and talk about why we believe this. But this is what it was about.

The reason was we needed a death clause. We needed to be freed from the legal obligation we were under because we couldn't fulfill our end of the deal.

We couldn't live according to the law. We constantly broke the rules. But look at verse 4. So, my dear brothers and sisters, Romans 7. This is the point.

[13:15] You died to the power of the law when you died with Christ. Listen to what he's not saying. He's not saying the law died. He's not saying God came down and said, Ah, forget the rule book.

Throw it out. It's not really that important after all. No, that didn't change. Jesus died. And when you place your faith in him, when you say, I choose to follow Jesus, then he's inviting you to die with him.

He's saying, good, then you're going to die. If you want to follow me, it's the path leading to death. I think it was two years ago or so that I brought the big wooden cross.

Y'all, you've been around here a while. You know that big wooden cross talking about. How many of you remember when I had that big wooden cross up here? You're about to tear up my jacket that I was wearing. That big old rough cross. And it was heavier than I anticipated it would be.

But I was talking about how when Jesus calls us to follow him, he says, pick up your cross and die daily. You don't win a lot of followers when you're saying, Hey, come with me.

[14:22] We're going to die together. Not a whole lot of people want to come with you at that point, right? But when you're talking to a bunch of people that are trapped in a toxic relationship, that they can't ever live up to the expectations of the other person, and it's constant failure, failure, failure, failure.

And then you say, hey, I've got an escape clause. You have to die first, but you'll be brought back to life. Suddenly, the prospect of death looks a whole lot more appealing.

That's what Jesus did. He said, I've got an escape clause for you, but it's a death clause. You have to die. And then I'll give you real life.

Because what you have right now, that's no way to live. There's nothing attractive about that. There's nothing fulfilling about that.

I can give you real life. What did Paul say? In Galatians chapter 2 and verse 20, I have been crucified. That was the very difficult form of death that Jesus endured.

[15:36] That's not a nice lethal injection where they just put something in your bloodstream and you're gone. It's not even the electric chair. It's not dying in your sleep in old age.

This was a very difficult, painful, torturous death. It says, I have been crucified with Christ. Listen, the process of dying to your old self is often very difficult.

It can be painful. But the reward is the only reward worth having. I've been crucified with Christ. So I no longer live.

I'm no longer under contract with the law anymore. Because one of the parties died. It was me. But now Christ lives in my place.

I couldn't raise myself from the dead. But Jesus could. And he gives me his life. So I get to live his life now. That's why he says, you're not your own.

[16:41] I bought you with a price. So the life that you now have, it comes from me. The old life, you don't want that anymore. You were trapped.

That was no way to live. But the life I now live in this body, same body, totally different life. The life I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God.

We're not saved because we could keep the law. We're not saved because we could follow the rules. We don't have new life because of anything we could do. We have new life because of our faith in the one who could die and rise from the dead.

We live by the faith in the Son of God. Because he loved me and he gave himself for me to free me, to release me by the cross. When Jesus died, the death clause was officially triggered.

And now any of you can claim it. Anybody can claim it. Say, by faith in Jesus, I claim his clause, his escape clause.

[17:48] Get me out of this contract that I can't abide by. Get me out of trying to live by this rule book that I'll never be able to measure up to. The referee can't throw the flag on you anymore.

Because it's not your life. It's someone else's. It's not your righteousness. It's his. It's not your perfection. It's Christ's. We claim him now, not ourselves.

And that leads us to finally number three. A new way to serve. We saw, first of all, that we can't escape the old relationship that we had to get out of.

We were trapped in. And it's through the radical release of the cross. And now look down at verse four. He didn't leave us in the grave. He calls us to resurrection. He calls us to new life.

We just, we weren't just released from the old contract to be left alone to our own devices. We were given a new purpose. He says in verse four, the second part, that you might belong to another.

[18:48] But look back at the first part. You died to the power of the law when you died with Christ so that you might belong to someone else, to another. To him who was raised from the dead.

Who's that? Let's say his name together, church. I think y'all can do better than that as a first Baptist church on a Sunday morning. Right? Who is it? Yes, it is. That's right.

We could say his name with our chest here, right? That we might belong to Jesus, him who was raised from the dead. In order that, here's the new purpose, we might bear fruit for God.

We have been remarried. We got out of the old toxic relationship that you couldn't get out of. You and the law. It was no fun. Now we've been remarried.

And we're called the bride of who? Christ. We are the bride of Christ. So now we have a new way to serve. And we get to see what a good, healthy marriage looks like.

[19:47] Paul gives us instructions. We get to read Jesus' teaching and see that in a healthy relationship, we're here to serve one another. What did Jesus come to do? He came to seek and to

serve those who were lost.

Jesus, the son of God, humbled himself and came to serve us. I mean, how backwards is that? The king of the universe stepping down from his throne and saying, I'm coming to serve you.

And then he says, now you're called to serve me. Why? Because we're in this relationship together.

We're in this marriage relationship together. So we're called to a new way to serve.

Not out of obligation. Not out of bondage. Not because we're contractually obligated to. But because of the heart of Christ replacing our heart.

Not out of bondage. So, Ezekiel. We get to read about this. The prophet Ezekiel. Centuries before Jesus ever showed up on the scene. He got this word from God and he shared it with the people.

[20:45] And God predicted. He said, I will give you a new heart. And I'll put a new spirit in you.

Who's that spirit, church? The Holy Spirit. I will remove from you your heart of stone and I'll give you a heart of flesh.

I will put my spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees. I'm not going to require you. Hold you with a gun to your head and say, follow my decrees.

I'm going to move you by my spirit through your new heart to follow my decrees. The decree of love. The call of love.

That is so much more effective than the law could ever be. Now, why do we still operate? As though God is still operating by the law.

He's not. But we look at him that way. We look at his church that way. We look at this, what we call the Christian life that way. Well, I got to follow the rules or God's not going to be happy with me.

[21:55] God loves you beyond what you could ever imagine. That's why he gave you this escape clause. That's why he died to free you. And he invites you to die with him.

And then be born again. With a new purpose. A new way to serve. Not out of obligation. But out of the call of love from him to you.

And then in response, it kindles, it sparks this love in your heart for him. And for the ones he loves. So look around the room. These are the ones he loves.

The people next to you. The people in front of you and behind you. Even you. Pull out your wife's mirror from her purse and look at yourself. You don't have to do that, right? God loves that one too.

That's who he died for as well. You don't belong to the referees anymore. You don't belong to the laws anymore. You don't belong to sin and darkness anymore. Jesus bought you.

[22:54] He paid the highest price for you. And now you belong to him. And he has released you. He's freed you into a new way of life. So you belong to a savior. Not a rule book.

You belong to a savior. Not a rule book. Thank God for salvation. Thank God for my savior. And for yours. The referees can't call penalties on you anymore.

They got to step out of the game. The death clause has been used. You belong to Jesus. Would you bow your heads with me? Listen, there are so many takeaways that we could have this morning.

But I just want to remind you. I'm going to let the Holy Spirit do the application. He's got his ways of knowing what's going on in your heart and in your life. And maybe you've been holding yourself to a standard that you can't live up to anymore.

Maybe others have been holding you to that standard. I'm here to tell you with the authority of Jesus from his words. That you are no longer under the law.

[23:57] You don't belong to that old system. He has freed you. You belong to him and him alone. You are now held to the standard of love. It's going to be demanding.

But so rewarding. And it's constantly forgiving. And it's what God has to offer you today. If you've never accepted that gift.

Today is the day. Don't walk out of this room today resisting Jesus and his call to you. If there's anyone in the room today who says today is the day I want to respond to Jesus and say yes.

By faith in you, your death, your resurrection, I believe that you love me and you want me to become your child. And today is the day I'm going to say yes to Jesus. Would you slip your hand up? Say yes.

That's me. Today is the day I'm going to say yes to Jesus. Thank you. For most of you in the room, I believe that by not raising your hand, you're testifying that you've already done that.

[24:54] And you know without a shadow of a shadow of doubt that you are a child of God. So let me invite you to do this. Let me invite you to remind yourself right now in this moment as Jared

plays.

And we're going to sing the chorus of a song before we dismiss. But right now in this moment, while everybody's heads bowed, there's nothing else going on, nothing else you need to worry about. Lunch can wait.

We'll get there in a minute. But right now, say God remind me who I am every day. That I belong to you. Remind me what really matters to you.

Remind me what your expectations are of me. Not that I follow every rule correctly. But that I listen to your spirit. And when I fall, you pick me back up.

When I fail, you forgive. In Jesus' name. Amen. You can keep your seats. Can we just sing through that chorus one more time? In praise and adoration of our Savior, the one who freed us.

[25 : 54] You're worthy of it all. You're worthy of all. For from you are all things. To you are all things. You deserve glory. Let's sing it together. You're worthy of all.

You're worthy of all. Yes, you're worthy of all. You're worthy of all. For from you are all things. Praise to you are all things. For you deserve glory. Let's get in the glory. Sing it one final time together. You're worthy of all.

All our praise. All our glory. You're worthy of all. We have nothing without him. For from you are all things.

Yes, you are all things. For you deserve glory. God, that's our testimony to you. That's our cry to you.

[26 : 58] That's our prayer to you. Thanksgiving, you are worthy of all of our praise. Not because you held the rule book over our head and said you've got to live up to it.

But because you freed us through your death, through your resurrection, that you offer to us. That's why you deserve glory. So you're worthy of all.

But let our lives glorify you. It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.