

***Micah 6:6-8 (Opening)***

- 6     *“With what shall I come before the LORD,  
          and bow myself before God on high?  
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,  
          with calves a year old?*
- 7     *Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,  
          with ten thousands of rivers of oil?  
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,  
          the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”*
- 8     *He has told you, O man, what is good;  
          and what does the LORD require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
          and to walk humbly with your God?*

## Introduction

The United States is a country of laws, or at least we say we are. I guess the biggest problem with that is that there's nothing anywhere that says the laws have to make sense.

There's lots of silly laws on the books across this country. If you go on the Internet and search for silly or odd laws, you'll get a lot of different websites with lots of different silly or odd laws, but I wasn't able to find many of them on web sites that actually list real laws. Of course that doesn't mean they're not on the books, it just means I couldn't find them.

Here's one good example of that. There are many web sites that say it's illegal here in Augusta to walk down the street playing the violin. Now, I haven't been able to find that law in any reputable law web sites, and I didn't go to the city offices and ask, but I have to wonder what the rationale was behind a law like that. I guess you can't play the violin in a parade. Or you shouldn't, just to be safe.

Here are a few of the silly laws I was able to at least somewhat substantiate.

In the state of Alabama, you are only allowed five minutes to vote.

Little Rock, Arkansas, city code section 25-74 says that "No person shall sound the horn on a vehicle at any place where cold drinks or sandwiches are served after 9:00 PM."

In Indianapolis, Indiana, no horse shall be driven or ridden on any street in the city at a speed in excess of 10 miles per hour.

In the state of New York, it is illegal to throw a ball at someone's head for fun.

In Youngstown, Ohio, it is illegal to run out of gas.

I'm sure all of these laws started out with a reasonable purpose, but the basic idea behind them seems to have become hidden somehow over time. Now these laws just seem silly.

It's really easy to lose track of the ideas behind the laws, since it's just the written part of the law that we have, and language is far from perfect at expressing exactly what we're thinking.

### **The letter of the law**

So why am I talking about strange or silly laws? Well, because in Romans chapter seven, Paul continues his discussion about laws; not strange or silly ones, but the Law of Moses, and how it affects Christians. Let's look at Romans 7:1-6.

### **Romans 7:1-6**

*<sup>1</sup> 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?*

*<sup>2</sup> 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.*

*<sup>3</sup> 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.*

*<sup>4</sup> 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.*

*<sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> 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.*

Funny thing about laws, once you're dead, they don't apply to you anymore. But it's odd to think about laws applying to people who are dead.

Paul has already compared becoming a Christian with dying. Back in chapter 6 he points this out.

### ***Romans 6:3-4***

*<sup>3</sup> Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup> We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*

So, since we're dead to the law, we aren't bound by the law anymore.

Paul uses the analogy of a married couple to describe the relationship between the Law and someone under its authority. Paul says that when a man dies, his wife is free to marry another, and is no longer bound to that man. Since when we were baptized we were baptized into Christ's death, and buried, just as one would bury a dead person, we have died to the Law. We are no longer bound by the Law, having died with Christ, so we're free to be bound to Christ, and covered by grace.

### **The Spirit of the Law**

But Paul points out something else in Romans 7:6. He says we're 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."

What does Paul mean, "Serve in the way of the Spirit"? Well, let's look a few other places and see if we can figure out what Paul's talking about.

Let's start in Galatians. Paul wrote to the Galatians because there were problems there with people trying to convince new Christians that they had to follow the Law of Moses to be a good Christian. Of course we see from our verses in Romans today that Paul says that's not the case; in fact, just the opposite. Let's take a look at Galatians 5:16-24, where Paul compares and contrasts those in the Spirit and those in the flesh.

### ***Galatians 5:16-24***

<sup>16</sup> *But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.* <sup>17</sup> *For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.* <sup>18</sup> *But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.* <sup>19</sup> *Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality,* <sup>20</sup> *idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions,* <sup>21</sup> *envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.* <sup>22</sup> *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,* <sup>23</sup> *gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.* <sup>24</sup> *And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*

Paul points out what people who live by the flesh do: all those evil things that he lists in verses 19-21; another one of Paul's lists of evil behaviors. But he lists these behaviors to contrast them against the good things that the Spirit does through us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. All these things come from the Spirit, not the flesh. We can't live that way without having the Spirit in us.

But think about this for a second. All these good things, the fruit of the Spirit; wouldn't you do these following the Law of Moses?

Let's look at Matthew 22:34-40.

### ***Matthew 22:34-40***

<sup>34</sup> *But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together.* <sup>35</sup> *And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him.* <sup>36</sup> *"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?"* <sup>37</sup> *And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with*

*all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.* <sup>38</sup> *This is the great and first commandment.* <sup>39</sup> *And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.* <sup>40</sup> *On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”*

Jesus says here that all the Law and the Prophets depend on loving God completely, and loving our neighbor like we love ourselves. Let's look at a quick summary of the 10 commandments and see how this might work.

1. Don't have any other gods before Him.
2. Don't make idols.
3. Don't take the name of the LORD your God in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
5. Honor your father and your mother.
6. Don't murder.
7. Don't commit adultery.
8. Don't steal.
9. Don't lie.
10. Don't covet.

The first four focus on our relationship with God, the last six focus on our relationship with other people. If you break the Law into those two groups, the first four are covered by "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind". If you do that, you won't break any of the first four commandments. The second group, the last six, is covered by "Love your neighbor as yourself". If you do that, you won't murder, commit adultery, or any of the other things, because you wouldn't want anyone to do that to you.

The problem with the Law of Moses was **not** that it wasn't a good set of rules. In fact, most of these laws have been part of societies around the world for centuries; millennia, even. The problem with the Law of Moses was the heart of man. When we are given laws like this, we want

to obey what's written there, but not worry about what the intent of the law was.

### **Live by the Spirit**

That was what Jesus was talking about during the Sermon on the Mount. Let's turn to Matthew 5, starting in verse 21 and see what Jesus has to say about it.

#### **Matthew 5:21-22**

*<sup>21</sup> "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' <sup>22</sup> But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.*

Jesus says it's not murdering that's the problem. The problem is the attitude behind it; the anger. Jesus says even insulting someone is just as bad as murdering them. I need to remind myself of that quite often.

In the next paragraph, Jesus points out another symptom of this heart problem.

#### **Matthew 5:27-28**

*<sup>27</sup> "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'  
<sup>28</sup> But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*

The letter of the law says "Don't do it", but Jesus says "Don't even think about it!" The problem isn't in committing the sin; it's what leads up to committing the sin. The problem is that we're not right, spiritually.

Remember what Paul said back in Galatians chapter 5: "For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do."

## Closing

So, how do we live by the spirit? How do we stop the cycle of these problems, doing all these things that Paul lists as works of the flesh? We need to rely on the spirit, and to do that, we need to kill off the old man, the sinful man, the body of the flesh that has all these desires. We do that by obeying God, and following Jesus; giving in to Jesus as our Lord, letting Him have total control of our lives. Then we need to bury the dead body by immersion in water to take away our sins.

But there's more to it than becoming a Christian. We need to understand God's word and God's will for us. To do that, we need to study the Bible; not just read and skim through the Bible, but really study; work at understanding what's there in the context that it's written in and how it applies to us today.

As Christians, we're no longer bound to the law, but that doesn't mean we don't obey it. It means that we are no longer dealing with a system that dispenses justice. Now, as Christians, we have mercy, not justice. We no longer get what we deserve; we are given, through God's grace, the mercy and forgiveness we desire.

Wouldn't you rather have mercy than justice?

## **2 Corinthians 3:1-6 (Closing)**

<sup>1</sup> Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you? <sup>2</sup> You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all. <sup>3</sup> And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

<sup>4</sup> Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. <sup>5</sup> Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, <sup>6</sup> who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.