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In *Romans 7* Paul speaks about the person who has a desire for victory over sin and to live a holy life but who misunderstands how to live it. The Holy Spirit uses the picture of marriage here (*verse 4*). When we were unconverted, we were married to the *old man*. After conversion, instead of being married to Christ, we make the mistake of marrying the Law. Every believer makes this mistake when seeking for victory over sin. He first tries to get victory over sin in his own strength - this is being married to the Law. In *Chapters 6 and 7*, we see these three spiritual "*marriages*" - first to the old man, then to the Law and finally to Christ.

The old man can be likened to a wicked husband who beats his wife, turns her into a prostitute and destroys her life and her happiness. This battered wife longs to be free of this wicked husband. One day her husband - the old man is dead. She is born again! Now she is free to marry again. But instead of marrying Christ she makes the mistake of marrying someone who looks like Christ - the Law.

The Law is perfect, and so it is easy to mistake the Law for Christ, because it demands perfect righteousness. The Law is not like the old man. He doesn't hammer his wife or beat her or trouble her in any way. But he demands perfection. You must wake up promptly at 6 o'clock in the morning. You must have breakfast ready on the table by 8 o'clock. It must not be 8:01, but exactly 8 o'clock. That is *perfection*. Every part of the house must be absolutely tidy and clean. The shoes must always be kept in the proper place, the clothes must be washed perfectly without any stain, and ironed perfectly too. The Law never asks you to do anything evil. But how many young sisters would like to marry a good man like this who demands such perfection in every area? Marrying the Law after being married to the old man now looks like having jumped out of the frying pan and into the fire. He is a good man, but he is so demanding. He never asks for anything evil, but you can never measure up to his standards. Then you realise that you have married the wrong man. So what can you do now? The Law - God's Law - can never die! Here is a husband who is healthy and strong and who will live forever. "*The married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive*" (7:2). So the woman gives up all hope of ever being happy.

Then God does something wonderful. He makes the woman die, and that breaks the marriage-vow. The first time it was the husband (the old man) who died. Now it is the wife (you) who dies. "*My brethren, you were made to die to the Law so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead*" (7:4). Now that you have died with Christ, you are not bound to the Law any more. And God raises you from the dead so that you can be married to Christ. That is the third marriage - and it is a glorious one! But Christ is also very demanding. He is as perfect as the Law and says, "Breakfast must be on the table at exactly 8 o'clock - not at 8:01. Everything must be spick and span. The house must be tidy", etc. His standards are not one whit lower than the standards of the Law. In fact they are actually higher. The Law only said,

"You shall not commit adultery." But Christ says, "You shall not even lust after a woman in your heart." But there is a big difference between Christ and the Law. Christ says, "Let's make breakfast together - you and I." He wants us to do everything in partnership with Him.

Suppose you are one of those inefficient wives who can get breakfast ready only by 1 pm in the afternoon! The Lord won't condemn you and reject you like the Law would. He says, "Never mind, we will work together and you will improve." And so the Lord works with you and in a few days you manage to get the breakfast ready by 11 am in the morning. The Lord says, "Wonderful! We have moved from 1 pm to 11 am. We are going to make it to 8 am one of these days. We will press on to perfection." If you are poor at washing clothes and the stains still remain on the clothes, the Lord says, "Never mind, we will work on that area too." The next time you wash clothes, with His help, you find that there are less stains left behind. And the Lord is determined to work with you until there is not a single stain left on any of the washed clothes - He will work with you until you attain perfection.

Do you see how the Lord works with His bride? He doesn't just give us commands like the Law does. He works with us - we are His co-workers. That's the type of husband Jesus is.

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