UNASHAMED · STUDENT GUIDE

Dead *Letter*

ROMANS 7:1-6 · PASTOR BRIAN CARROLL · NOVEMBER 1, 2026

> *What do you do with a rule you can't keep and can't escape?*

[1] 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. (Romans 7:1–6, ESV)

SERMON NOTES

POINT 1 · VV. 1-3

Signed, Sealed, and Binding

"The law has jurisdiction only over the living."

POINT 2 · V. 4

Addressee Deceased

"The letter is still good. It is the addressee who is gone."

POINT 3 · VV. 5-6

New Address

"The one you belong to doesn't just give you new rules. He gives you a new heart to want them."

YOUR TURN: WHAT'S IN YOUR OLD MAILBOX?

What accusation or demand keeps showing up with your old name on it? "You'll never change." "God's tired of you." "Try harder." Write it down, then write what's true now that you belong to Jesus.

GO DEEPER

"Only as long as he lives" (v. 1) Paul states the principle before the illustration: law has authority over living people. A will, a contract, a marriage vow — death ends them all. That's the hinge of the whole passage. The question isn't whether the law is still true. It's whether you are still there for it to bind.

"Through the body of Christ" (v. 4) This is union with Christ, the same idea as Romans 6: buried with him, crucified with him. Paul says it about himself in Galatians 2:19–20: "Through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ." Your old self didn't escape the penalty; it was carried out on Jesus.

"Aroused by the law" (v. 5) A rule shows you what's right, but it can't make you want it. In one study, toddlers were told not to peek at a toy and left alone; about 80% peeked. Paul will dig into why next week in verses 7–12, and he'll insist the law itself is not the problem. Sin is.

"The letter" vs. "the Spirit" (v. 6) The phrase translated "written code" is literally "the letter." Paul uses the same contrast in 2 Corinthians 3:6: "the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." The old way was rules on the outside. The new way is God's Spirit on the inside, the promise of Ezekiel 36:26–27.

HONEST QUESTIONS

So do Christians still have to obey the Old Testament? Paul doesn't say the law is bad or that holiness doesn't matter. Next week he calls it "holy and righteous and good" (7:12). What changed is your relationship to it. Parts like sacrifices and food laws pointed to Jesus and are fulfilled in him. God's moral will hasn't changed. But you no longer obey it to earn a standing with God. You obey it because you belong to him, with his Spirit helping you.

If I'm free from the law, can I do whatever I want? Paul already shut that door twice in chapter 6 ("By no means!"). Verse 6 says we're released "so that we serve." Freedom from the law isn't freedom from obedience. It's freedom to obey for a better reason and with real power.

I'm forgiven. Why do I still feel guilty? Some guilt is God's Spirit showing you sin. Listen to that, confess it, and turn from it (1 John 1:9). But there's another voice that says, "You have to make up for this before God will accept you." That one is old mail. If you're in Christ, the answer is, "I died with Christ. I belong to him now."

I never grew up with the Ten Commandments. How is that binding on me? Romans 2:14–15 says people without the written law still have its work "written on their hearts," with their conscience bearing witness. You've known some things are wrong your whole life. The letter is addressed to you whether you've opened it or not.

THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGE

Pick one place where you've been asking, "What's the least I can do?" Homework, chores, a friendship, forgiving someone. This week, ask instead, "What pleases the one I belong to?" Do one thing about it, and tell one person you trust.

REFLECT

1. Before today, how would you have described your relationship to God's rules? Fear, guilt, indifference, or something else?
2. Where do you most often hear the "old mail" voice? What would change if you answered it with Romans 7:4?
3. Verse 4 says you belong to Jesus "in order that we may bear fruit for God." What is one piece of fruit you'd like to see God grow in you this year?