

The trouble with metaphors, Christians, is that they're never quite perfect. There's always something about them that just doesn't quite work. You can take them too far, even to kind of silly conclusions. Let's use the metaphor: "That person over there is a snake." Now, we know what that metaphor means. That person is not to be trusted. They're the kind of person that will stab you in the back. They're devious. They're hidden. All those kinds of things. We understand what the metaphor is trying to say. But you could take that too far to say something that it never intended to mean. Like: does that person crawl around on the ground like a snake? Does that person have a forked tongue? Does that person swallow their food whole? Obviously not. So the metaphor only works up to a point, and after that point the comparison breaks down.

The same is also true for Biblical metaphors, Christians. They talk about heavenly realities, things far beyond our comprehension, and try to put them into human language. But they only go so far before they break down, and we have to talk about it in some other way. In the previous chapter, for example, Paul compared our relationship to God to slavery. We were once slaves to sin, and now we have become slaves to righteousness. We belong, body and soul, entirely to God. And the metaphor works very, very well to express that idea. But it only goes so far, because eventually we come to some wrong ideas about what that might mean. Does that mean that God just bought us and he doesn't actually care for us? Does that mean that because we have been bought by him, that's all we need to worry about? We don't need to change anything about how we live? At a certain point it just doesn't work. And the thing that it really doesn't work with, Christians, is the fact that this transfer, this change happens only because of death. That's something that the metaphor of slavery could never actually tell us. So we need to use a different idea, something else to talk about this reality of God, something that works a little bit better.

And so what is that picture, this other idea that Paul uses? It's the idea of marriage, specifically, the example of a married woman. Now, why does he use this idea? Because, on the one hand, it shows that bond which we have between ourselves and God, that bond that is like the relationship between a husband and a wife. But more importantly, this is also something that only comes to an end at death. Till death do us part, and all of that.

So that's why Paul says in our reading, verse 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?" Now, we should be able to understand that right away. Laws only apply to the living. You can't apply laws to a dead man. It's not like you can go to a dead man and bring him to court or tell him to obey the law or obey the speed limit, or something like that. He's dead. The law just no longer applies to him. He is beyond the law, because laws are only for the living.

This is why Paul says, then, verse 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." So as long as her husband is alive, the wife is bound by the law of marriage to that husband. She is not permitted to go and become the wife of someone else. In this case, she is bound to him and him alone. But if her husband dies, then she is set free from that law. It no longer applies to her. She has been released from it.

Now, we have to keep in mind here the Biblical picture of marriage if we're going to understand what Paul is trying to get at here. Because if we come at this with the world's idea of marriage,

we're not going to get his point at all. And one of the first things that the Bible tells us about marriage is that it is lifelong. It is something that is intended to continue as long as we are alive. Divorce was never part of the picture. Divorce is something that was permitted, the Bible says, because of sin, but it was contrary to God's original intention for marriage. This is why Jesus says in Matthew chapter 19: "Because of your hardness of heart, Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so." So divorce was never supposed to be part of the picture. A man and a woman married to one another for life.

But also, the other part which has to be kept in mind here is that the husband is the head of his wife. There is an order within marriage. Ephesians 5 says very clearly: "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its savior." Now, this idea, of course, can, and it has been abused. The husband being the head of the wife does not give him permission to just do whatever he pleases. He is called to love his wife the same way that Christ loved the church: to be willing to give himself for her, even lay down his life for her. That is the biblical picture for a husband in relationship to his wife. But that doesn't change the fact that the wife is the body of her husband. The wife is under her husband. She is his body as he is her head. You can even take the word in verse 2 here that says "married" and translate it as "under the man." That's what it says. And all of this needs to be kept in mind if we're going to understand what it is that Paul is trying to say in our reading for today.

So this is why he says in verse 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." So in other words, if her husband is still alive, she's married to him. She can't simply just go to another man and become his wife or act like his wife. In that case, she becomes an adulteress. But if her husband is dead, then she is free, free to marry another, free to take a new husband, free to be under that new man. That is the picture that Paul sets up in these three verses.

So what's his point then? What is he trying to say? Verse 4: "Likewise, my brothers." Pay attention. This is the comparison. "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." So in other words, we are the wife. We once had a different husband, and that is the law. And as long as we were married to him, as long as we were married to the law, we were under him and could not belong to another.

Now, what does Paul mean when he says that we were married to the law? We are married to the law because of who we once were, Christians. Because all of us by nature are under the law. Everyone, even the unbeliever. We all stand under the law of God. Paul makes that very clear in the first few chapters of this book. No one can claim to be exempt from the law. No one can claim to be outside of it. And it's not like we can simply divorce ourselves from it either. We were married to the law, and because of that, we were married to works, trying to save ourselves by works. But the only way that we were going to ever get out of this relationship, out of this marriage, is by death. Because then the law of marriage comes to an end. Till death do us part.

But that's a problem. It's a problem because the law does not save us. It can't save us, because it is based on our works. Because if we were able to be saved by being married to the law, then

anyone could be saved, even without faith. We wouldn't need Jesus. But Paul makes it perfectly clear that that can never happen. We are not justified by our works before God. So what can be done? We have to start a new relationship, a new marriage, but that's only going to happen through death. Because then the law of marriage comes to an end. As long as the husband is still living, we are bound to that husband.

Pay close attention here, though, to what Paul actually says in verse 4. He says: "You also have died to the law." Your husband didn't die. The law did not die. You did. The wife died. Now, why does he say this? Because we don't want to think of the law as something bad, as if it was something that forced us to do all of these bad things. Paul will make very, very clear in the rest of this chapter that the law is good and righteous and holy. It is our sins that caused all of these problems. But as long as we were still living, we were bound to the law. But now that you have died, you have been set free from the law. You are no longer bound to your first marriage. You have died through Christ so that you can belong to another. The law of marriage has come to an end because of the death you died in Jesus. So you are not an adulteress. You are legally married to another, that is, Jesus Christ, our Lord. He is now your husband, and we are his wife, the Church.

But what's the purpose of all this? Why does Paul use this language? To talk about the same reason why God created marriage in the first place, that is, to bear fruit. Because as Genesis 1, verse 28, tells us: "God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply.'" It's like we often hear at weddings. One of the reasons why God created marriage in the first place is because of children. And so this is no different. We have been called to bear children for God, spiritual children, that is, our good works.

Because in our old marriage, that was not the case. It couldn't be the case. Because as verse 5 tells us: "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." So our sins caused us to bear children for sin, and sin only leads us to death. Notice again, he doesn't say that the law did this. It was sin stirred up by the law that caused us to do this. But the result is still the same. We were not bearing good fruit, fruit which would lead to life.

But now, verse 6: "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." Now, he changes his metaphor again here. He goes back to the way he was talking before, so we don't want to get confused. But the idea is still the same. We are no longer under the law. We are no longer married to the law. We are now married to another, bearing children, bearing fruit for God, walking in the way of the Spirit, doing what is pleasing in his sight. So we're not married to the law trying to be saved by our works. We are now married to Christ, bearing spiritual children, our good works, in all that we think and say and do.

So Christians, let us not go back to that old way, to the way of sin. Because then we would be an adulteress. Then we would be turning away from our husband. We are now married to Christ. And because we are married to him, let us bring forth those fruits in our love for him and also for one another. Because this is who we are now: dead to sin, but alive for God. Thanks be to God that he has done all of this for us in his Son, Jesus Christ!

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you have given us new life in your Son, Jesus Christ. Help us always to follow after him in everything so that we may bring forth fruit for you in all that we do. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.