

**First Baptist Church, Granite Falls, MN**  
**Pastor Todd Mitchell**  
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### **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

In our study of Paul's letter to the Romans, we have arrived at Romans 7. Last week, we began to look at the first six verses of Romans 7, and this morning, we will look closer at those first six verses. But before we do that, let's do just a little bit of review. We need to go back and look at something Paul said in chapter 6, because it helps us understand why he says the things he does here in Romans 7.

Listen again to what Paul says in Romans 6:12-13:

Romans 6:12-13 12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. 13 Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.

Do you hear what Paul is saying there? He's telling the Romans not to sin. He's telling the Romans to be righteous. Now, what would you expect him to say next?

Imagine you are a school bus driver, and you pull up to a bus stop where there is a huge crowd of children. These children have a reputation for causing problems. As you drive up, you can even see them fighting with each other. So after all those children get on the bus, you stand up and face those kids, and you say, "I want you to stop being such bad children. I want you to be good children!"

Now, most school bus drivers would probably not stop there. Most would go on to say something like, "You must obey the rules! You *will* remain in your seats. You *will not* put your hands outside the windows. *No* shouting, *no* screaming, *no* fighting, *no* throwing anything." I know I would want to lay down the law for a group of kids like that.

Probably the *last* thing in the world you would say would be, "Kids, I want you to be good, and I know you will be good, because you are not bound by the rules." But that's exactly what Paul says in Romans 6:14!

Right after telling the Romans not to sin, right after telling them to be righteous, he says the last thing in the world you would expect him to say. He says, in 6:14, "For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace."

Wait, Paul! Think about what you are saying! If you are telling them not to sin, if you are telling them to be righteous, then you *ought* to be telling them, "Do not forget the rules. Do not forget the law. The law is very important. You must keep the law, if you want to be good."

And you know, once upon a time, that's exactly what Paul would have said. Because before Paul believed in Jesus, he was a Pharisee. He knows very well that the Jews will be very upset and confused when they hear him say, "sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace." And so he is quick to explain himself, not only to the legalists think he should be teaching the law but also to the libertines who want an excuse to sin because they are no longer under the law.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*®, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

For the rest of chapter 6, Paul explains that the *last* thing he is teaching is lawlessness. He is not saying, “Let’s sin because we are not under the law but under grace.” Paul is very clear that those who are in Christ have become slaves to righteousness. But when you get to the end of chapter 6, Paul still hasn’t explained how this works. Just how does this work, that “sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace?”

Which brings us to chapter 7:1-6. In this passage, Paul explains how this works.

Romans 7:1-6 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 Thus 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 not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.

It is very important to remember that Paul is talking to Christians, here. He is not talking to unbelievers. How do we know that? Look at the first part of v. 4: “Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ.” Paul is talking to his fellow believers, those whom he described in 6:3 as “all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus.”

So if you have never put your faith in Christ, then Paul is not talking to you here, not directly. You are invited to listen in on what Paul has to say to Christians, but if you have never put your faith in Christ, then you are still enslaved to sin; you are still under the law, and if you died today, you would be judged and found guilty under the law, and you would face an eternity of God’s wrath and fury.

But to Christians, Paul explains:

- It is to bear fruit for God that we have died to the law
- To bear fruit for God, we had to die to the law
- To bear fruit for God, we serve in the new life of the Spirit

## **I. It is to Bear Fruit for God That We Have Died to the Law**

To bear fruit for God – that’s the reason we’ve died to the law. Do you see that in v. 4? Here in v. 4 Paul says three things: 1) we have “died to the law” 2) that happened so that we may belong to another (Jesus), and 3) *that* happened so that we may bear fruit for God. One leads to the other which leads to the other. Let’s look at each of these three things before going on to v. 5.

### **A. We have “died to the law through the body of Christ”**

Now what does Paul mean by “the law?” Just what is that we’ve died to? We already know that Paul is not *overthrowing* the law – he said that in 3:31. And we already know that Paul is not teaching *lawlessness* – we know how much he hates lawlessness, from

6:19. What does Paul mean, that we have “died to the law?”

Here’s what Paul means, Christian. Before you had Christ’s righteousness, all you had was unrighteousness. You knew what was right and what was wrong – your conscience told you that. And the only way you could avoid being tormented by your conscience was to obey the law – obeying the law, the work of which was written on your heart, was the only path to righteousness that you knew. But you couldn’t do it. You only became more lawless. (Keep that in mind, because we’re going to come back to it when we get to v. 6.) The law was your master, and you failed him constantly.

But the moment you believed in Jesus, something happened in that instant that changed you forever. The moment that you believed in Jesus, you were united with him in death. In chapter 6 of Romans we saw that this unity with Jesus in his death meant death to sin. But here we see that it also means death to the law. “Through the body of Christ,” that is, united with him in the death he died on the cross, we are dead to sin, and we are dead to the law.

Now by the time we get to the end of v. 6, we’re going to see why you have to die to the law to die to sin. But for now, I just want you to get this one thing – that we’re talking about a huge change, a dramatic change, a life change. And it is irreversible. Christian, you have died to the law. That master whom you failed, the law, is no longer your master. Now, Christ is your master.

**B. We have died “so that [we] may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead”**

As long as we were alive to the law, we belonged to the law. And as long as we belonged to the law, we could not belong to Christ.

This is why Paul used the vivid illustration of marriage in vv. 2-3. Marriage is for life – as long as a husband and wife are alive, they are joined together by an unbreakable bond. They can get a hundred judges on earth to sign and seal a divorce decree, but they are still bound together as one flesh. Only death can break the bond. Once a husband dies, then, and only then, can a wife remarry.

As long as we were alive to the law, we could not be joined to Christ. We were bound to the law with an unbreakable bond. As long as we were alive to the law, we belonged to the law. Only death to the law could free us to be joined to Christ.

That’s because as long as we are trying to become righteous by obeying the law, we’re trusting in our own ability. And as long as we’re trusting in our own ability, we’re not trusting in Christ. And even worse, as we will see in v. 5, as long as we’re trusting in our own ability, we are going the opposite direction from Christ – instead of becoming more righteous, we become more unrighteous.

But when you believed, Christian, you died to the law, so that you could belong to Christ. Let that sink in. *You* belong to Christ. *You belong* to Christ. *You belong* to *Christ*.

1Co 6:19b-20a You are not your own, for you were bought with a price.

Ro 14:7b-8 . . . none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.

2Co 5:15b . . . he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

Belonging to Christ is as different from belonging to the law as day is from night. Whether openly rebellious against the law, or whether trying religiously to keep the law, the one who is alive to the law is focused upon himself.

Benjamin Franklin shows us, in his autobiography, what it looks like to be alive to the law. He made very clear that he was not a Christian. But he wrote, "I conceiv'd the bold and arduous project of arriving at moral perfection." But he realized that he had bad habits that were hard to break, so he came up with 13 rules for life and came up with a method to follow them. They were truly good rules. But listen to how he focused upon himself as he tried to keep these rules:

I made a little book, in which I allotted a page for each of the virtues. I rul'd each page with red ink, so as to have seven columns, one for each day of the week, marking each column with a letter for the day. I cross'd these columns with thirteen red lines, marking the beginning of each line with the first letter of one of the virtues, on which line, and in its proper column, I might mark, by a little black spot, every fault I found upon examination to have been committed respecting that virtue upon that day.

I determined to give a week's strict attention to each of the virtues successively . . . Proceeding thus to the last, I could go thro' a course compleat in thirteen weeks, and four courses in a year. And like him who, having a garden to weed, does not attempt to eradicate all the bad herbs at once, which would exceed his reach and his strength, but works on one of the beds at a time, and, having accomplish'd the first, proceeds to a second, so I should have, I hoped, the encouraging pleasure of seeing on my pages the progress I made in virtue, by clearing successively my lines of their spots, till in the end, by a number of courses, I should be happy in viewing a clean book, after a thirteen weeks' daily examination.<sup>2</sup>

What a perfect example of being alive to the law and dead to Christ! Benjamin Franklin belonged to the law, not to Christ. Even if he had succeeded in keeping his 13 rules perfectly (and he didn't – in his own words, "My scheme of ORDER gave me the most trouble . . . In truth, I found myself incorrigible"), he would have only born fruit for himself.

But it is not so with the believer.

### **C. We belong to Christ "in order that we may bear fruit for God"**

Do you see that, in Romans 7:4? We died to the law to belong to Christ, and we belong to Christ so that we may bear fruit for God.

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<sup>2</sup> *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, Online: <http://www.earlyamerica.com/lives/franklin/chapt8/>

Bearing fruit for anybody but God is idolatry. God is the one and only person in the universe for whom we should bear fruit. And bear fruit for him we should! “We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” (Eph 2:10b)

Benjamin Franklin’s goal was to be a good citizen of his country, and to be happy. And it is a good thing to be a good citizen, and it is a good thing to be happy – but only if they are means to the end of glorifying God. The moment that God ceases to be the recipient of our fruit, we begin to be idolaters.

So while Paul said in 6:22, “the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life,” he does *not* mean that the purpose of our fruit is our own eternal life. Yes, that is what will follow our fruit-bearing. But the purpose of our fruit – the purpose of Christ dying for us, the purpose of our being united with him in his death, the purpose of us dying to the law, the purpose of us belonging to him, is to *bear fruit for God*. This is about living a life of worship, Christian.

But what exactly does Paul mean here by this word “fruit?” I’ve read that some preachers have said that this must mean winning new converts. The argument goes like this – Paul is comparing our old union with the law, and our new union with Christ, with marriage. And everybody knows that the fruit of marriage is children. So if the purpose of belonging to Christ is to bear fruit for God, then that fruit must be spiritual offspring – people who heard the gospel from us and believed in Jesus.

But I do not believe that is what Paul is saying here. Yes, it is good to share the gospel, and we should. But Paul brings up marriage in vv. 2-3 simply to illustrate a strong bond that lasts for life, not to say anything about bearing spiritual offspring. It is obvious from the rest of chapter 7 that Paul is talking about the way we live our lives, not the way we share the gospel with people.

So, if “fruit” does not mean spiritual offspring, what *does* it mean? Look ahead for just a moment to the end of v. 6. There, Paul says that we serve “in the new life of the Spirit.” Whatever fruit we are bearing is fruit that we bear in the new life of the Spirit. And what is the fruit of the Spirit? Paul wrote, in Gal 5:22-23a, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.”

When you love God with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your strength, you are bearing fruit for God. When you love your neighbor as yourself, you are bearing fruit for God. When you are filled with joy in the Lord, you are bearing fruit for God. When you are an ambassador of peace, when you are patient with others, when you are kind and good and faithful and gentle, when you deport yourself with self-control, you bear fruit for God. And you can do this in your truck cab or your kitchen.

And to bear all this fruit for God, we *had* to die to the law!

## **II. To Bear Fruit for God, We Had to Die to the Law**

Why? Take a look at v. 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.”

## A. While we were alive to the law, “we were living in the flesh”

Now what does that mean? To find the answer, let’s look ahead for just a moment to Romans 8:5-6:

Rom 8:5b-6 . . . those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. 6 To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

Now this should ring a bell for us, since we have spent so much time in Romans 6. Because in 6:12, Paul said that if sin reigns in your body, you will obey the passions, or lusts, of your body – and the end of those things is death.

To live in the flesh is to be a slave to your passions. And that’s exactly where we were when we were alive to the law. The very conscience that tortured us with guilt was the very conscience that could not fight against the lusts of the flesh. We did not live our consciences. We lived our lusts. We lived in the flesh.

It is a very bad thing to live in the flesh. But in our culture today, it is considered normal. One time I had to talk to a social worker who was interviewing me about my childhood. It might have been when my mother was getting approval from the county to be a foster mother, or it might have been when my wife and I were getting approval to adopt our son. I don’t remember exactly. But I do remember telling the social worker about a time when I disappointed my parents and did something I regretted very much – something that I will always be ashamed of.

But this social worker tried convincing me that I should not feel ashamed at all. She asked, “Don’t you think that was just a normal part of growing up?” She asked, “Don’t you think you were just experimenting to learn about the world around you?”

Of course, that social worker was right, in a way. It *is* normal for people who live in the flesh to “experiment,” that is, to *indulge* in the world. And the more you tell a fleshly person not to do that, the more he will want to do it.

## B. “Our sinful passions [were] aroused by the law”

Do you see that, in v. 5? “Our sinful passions [were] aroused by the law.” In other words, the law did not make us righteous. Just the opposite. Our lusts became even worse because of the law.

We all know this to be true. Allow me to illustrate. Take a look at the vase of flowers on the table in front of me. Now, I doubt very much that any of you have been thinking, “I want to lift up that vase of flowers and look at what is underneath the vase.” But if I say, “Thou shalt not lift up the vase of flowers to see what is underneath,” *now you are* tempted to do it. If I say, “You must not lift up the vase! You must not look under there!” right away, many of you will have the sudden desire to disobey that command. The law arouses our sinful desire to rebel.

Ever heard somebody say something like, “The more you tell kids they can't do something the more they will want to an find a way to do it?” Well, that is true not just

for kids, but for adults too – no matter what age you are, *if you are living in the flesh*. And the results are deadly.

**C. “Our passions . . . were at work in our members to bear fruit for death”**

Remember what Paul said in 6:20-21?

Rom 6:20-21 20 When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. 21 But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? The end of those things is death.

Death. Eternal death. That’s what Paul was talking about there in 6:21 (remember, he was contrasting it with eternal life), and that’s what he’s talking about here in 7:5.

If you are not a believer, if you have not died to the law, then you are still under the law – and you will be judged by the same law that stimulates the very sinful passions that earn you God’s wrath and fury.

Christians, this is why we *had* to die to the law to bear fruit for God. Because as long as we were alive to the law, living in the flesh, our sinful passions were aroused by the law, working in our members to bear fruit for death.

Benjamin Franklin could not bear fruit for God by keeping a list of rules. To bear fruit for God, we must serve in the new life of the Spirit.

**III. To Bear Fruit for God, We Serve in the New Life of the Spirit**

Serving in the new life of the Spirit is not at all the same as serving under the law.

**A. “But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive”**

Do you see that, in v. 6? Christian, Paul is describing your life. The key to bearing fruit for God is not being a law-keeper. The key to bearing fruit for God is being released from the law.

And that has happened, if you are a Christian. The gospel you have believed, if indeed you trust in Christ alone for your righteousness, is a gospel that sets you free from the law.

There is such a thing as another gospel. Paul wrote to the Galatians:

Gal 1:6-9 6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— 7 not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. 9 As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

And in the rest of that letter, Paul teaches the Galatians not to listen to those teachers who wanted to deceive them into thinking they must keep the law to be saved. Those

teachers were bringing a gospel to the Galatians, but it was a different gospel, a false gospel, a gospel of lies.

Brothers and Sisters, take heed. We must not ever allow another gospel to be taught here. Not here, and not in our households. It has happened before. Charles Finney taught a false gospel, teaching that the only way to be saved was to live a perfect life. Many revivalists have followed his example, driving people with the whip of the law to get them to come down the aisle.

But Paul says, “But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive.”

**B. “We are released from the law . . . so that we serve not under the old written code”**

The old written code was always powerless by itself. Only when it was written on the heart could it bear fruit for God. That’s why God said to the Israelites:

Deu 6:5-6 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.

But when Jesus preached the sermon on the mount, he preached it to a people who did not have the law written on their hearts. The Pharisees observed the letter of the law, so that outwardly they looked clean, but inwardly, they were dirty.

That’s why over and over Jesus said things like,

Mat 5:21-22 21 You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ 22 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.

and:

Mat 5:27-28 27 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ 28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Jesus took them past the letter of the law to the spirit of the law. You see, it isn’t enough to obey the letter of the law in some shallow way. You need to obey the spirit of the law, not the letter of the law. You need to obey the principles that are underneath the law. If you do that, then you don’t even need the written law. That’s why Paul could say, “the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Gal 5:14)

**C. “We serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit”**

Paul is going to have a lot more to say about the new life of the Spirit. But for now, Christian, just make sure you understand that this is a completely different way of living than you once knew.

When you were in the flesh, under the law, the written code was your master and your guide. But all it succeeded in doing was arousing your passions. The best you could hope for was outward compliance, not inward obedience. The best you could do was to wash the outside of the cup, but the inside was filthy. But the new life of the Spirit is a life that is changed from the inside out.

Here's the difference. Under the old written code, when you got angry, you might try to keep from saying something you shouldn't by counting to ten, or by biting your tongue – all to obey the law. But inside, your heart was raging. All the things you were tempted to say, you were already saying in your heart. So you were full of sin, whether others saw it or not. Your heart was black.

But the new life of the Spirit is not a life of counting to ten or biting your tongue. The new life of the Spirit is *not needing* to count to ten, because you love your neighbor as yourself. The new life of the Spirit is *not needing* to bite your tongue, because you love your neighbor as yourself.

The same thing goes for lust. The new life of the Spirit is a life changed from the inside out, so that you do not indulge fleshly desire, but instead, you cultivate a Christ-like love for others. Instead of looking with the ravenous eyes of a wolf, you look with the pitying eyes of a shepherd, upon sheep in need of a shepherd. Because you love God and you love what he loves, and you want to bear fruit for him.

These are only two examples, but they illustrate the radical difference between living by the letter of the law and living the new life of the Spirit.

### **Conclusion**

Here in Romans 7:1-6, Paul explains:

- It is to bear fruit for God that we have died to the law
- To bear fruit for God, we had to die to the law
- And to bear fruit for God, we serve in the new life of the Spirit

So bear fruit for God by serving in the new life of the Spirit!

The reason you exist is to bear fruit for God. But you can never bear fruit for God by trying to keep the written law. You must serve in the new life of the Spirit, changed from the inside out. You must learn to love God, to love what he loves, and hate what he hates.

Praise God, we who are in Christ have died to the law!

Let us bear fruit for God by serving in the new life of the Spirit!