“IN ORDER THAT WE MAY BEAR FRUIT FOR GOD”

Romans 7:1–6
Key Verse: 7:4

> “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.”

Do you struggle with legalism? Some might say, “Oh, no, not *me*!” But we all probably have *some* sort of legalism. Maybe it’s a strict diet, or being super punctual, or uber-responsible. Or, we may have a whole slew of internal laws dictating every part of our daily behavior. *Why* would anyone embrace *legalism*? Well, it does give a sense of control and predictability. It convinces us we can gain worth through performance, compare ourselves with others, and feel superior. Legalism enables us to avoid the vulnerability that grace requires.

In Romans 6 we’ve been on a deep dive into sanctification. In Christ we can walk in newness of life. In his grace we’re called to present ourselves to God, every part of us, as weapons of righteousness. We’re called to live as grateful, wholehearted slaves to righteousness. But being sanctified does not mean we now live a legalistic life. Still, to some people, living as slaves to righteousness might sound like legalism.

So in 7:1–6 Paul writes that we have a new relationship with Christ that’s like a marriage. Just as in 6:3–5, this union with Christ is the foundation of our new life of sanctification. In this study we want to learn: what it means to die to the law; what union with Christ is really like; and, why this fruit-bearing life is so much better than a life of legalism. May God speak to us through his word today.

In Romans, Apostle Paul has been describing God’s *grace*. In chapter 3 he wrote that this *grace* is God’s one-sided rescue, totally paid for through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. In chapter 4 he wrote that God’s promise of salvation rests on *grace*, and we believe that promise even against all hope. In chapter 5 he wrote that this *grace* is a “free gift” that overpowers sin and reigns over it triumphantly, in righteousness and life. In chapter 6 he wrote that *grace* is our new master that breaks sin’s hold on us. We all need to believe, memorize, and cling to what Apostle Paul taught us about God’s grace in Romans.

Paul also has been describing *the law* of God. In chapter 2 he wrote that *the law* condemns hypocrisy. Then he made a series of statements about *the law*

that shatters any self-righteous view of it. In chapter 3 he wrote: “through *the law* comes knowledge of sin” (3:20b). In chapter 4 he wrote: “*the law* brings wrath” (4:15). In chapter 5 he wrote: “*the law* increases the trespass” (5:20a). In chapter 6 he wrote that we are “no longer under *law* but under grace” (6:14). We need to believe, memorize, and understand what Paul taught us about the law of God.

Now Paul uses all of chapter 7 to expound the role of God’s law in our new life. In verses 7–25 he will explain in what aspect we need the holy, righteous, and good law in our sanctification process. But first, in verses 1–6 he declares that in Jesus, our relationship to the law has changed. He’s referring to the law of God in the Old Testament. But “the law” can refer to any kind of legalism: moralism, ritualism, or any strict rules we follow to make ourselves “right.”

Read verse 1. Paul is really trying to persuade his audience here. He calls them “brothers.” He compliments their knowledge of the law. Then he states the obvious: “the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives.” Once death occurs, a person can’t be prosecuted under the law anymore. It’s futile to arrest or imprison a corpse, right? But what’s his point?

Let’s read verses 2–3. This law of marriage, taken from real life, is so helpful in understanding the change that happens when we become a Christian. People might feel guilty for switching spouses. But when a spouse dies, people are free to remarry if they choose. Paul is not delving into marriage law here; he’s illustrating the change that happens when we accept Christ.

What’s the change? Let’s read verse 4. Notice how Paul describes both the death of Christ and his resurrection. Christ’s death and resurrection are the core of the gospel. His death and resurrection are the power of God that changes everything. His death and resurrection are what bring us into the realm of grace.

Yet Paul is careful to say here that the gospel brings about not the death of the law, but *our* death. Earlier, he taught that in the death of Christ we died “to sin” (6:2). Here, he states that we died “to the law” (7:4). It’s just as when a person dies physically—the law no longer has authority over him.

In Christ, when we die to the law, the law no longer has authority over us—not in terms of its moral standards but in terms of our covenant relationship with God. If we receive Christ’s death and resurrection by faith, we are in a new covenant relationship with God. We all need to fully accept this new relationship.

What kind of relationship is it? Paul writes we now “belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead.” He means we now belong to the Risen Jesus. Jesus is our bridegroom. He is our source of grace, our source of love,

our source of security. We never have to feel condemned or threatened, even if we fail from time to time, because now we belong to Jesus, and he is faithful to us. He loves us with unfailing love. He's committed to us to the end.

In Ephesians Paul described this relationship: "...according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him" (Eph. 3:11–12). We no longer approach God like heavily burdened slaves, afraid of punishment, filled with inferiority or shame. Because of the greatness of his grace to us, we have the boldness to come to God through faith in Jesus. And now, in Jesus, we actually have access to the Holy God, with confidence. How amazing is that? But is this a real description of our relationship with God, of our daily prayer life? When we realize we belong to Jesus our Lord because of his grace, it *can* be.

Martin Luther had been a deeply devout monk, but he was trapped in suffocating legalism. He tortured himself with endless confessions and self-punishment. He was terrified of God's wrath and lacked any assurance. But when he received Romans 1:17, "the righteous shall live by faith," the Holy Spirit opened his eyes. He could see the free grace of Jesus, his true Bridegroom. He wrote in his famous treatise *On Christian Liberty* about "the happy exchange" a soul has who is united with Christ as a bride with her bridegroom. Luther was changed from an anxious, performance-driven legalist into a man filled with peace, grace, and love. He was sure he could come to Christ anywhere, anytime.

How can we, with all our sins, weaknesses, and flaws, experience this relationship with Jesus today? It's so simple. We just receive his grace by faith. We accept his shed blood for us by faith. We believe the truth that "he was delivered up for our trespasses and was raised for our justification" (4:26). We claim and hold tightly to this good news for us in Jesus.

We also need to reflect on Paul's words that our death to the law was "through the body of Christ." By writing this way, Paul is helping us see that it's way more than dry theology; he's describing a life-giving love. When he died on the cross, Christ took all the condemnation of the law in his own body and fulfilled all its requirements. And he did this for sinful people, for you and for me. When he gave his body, he shed his own blood. There is no greater love than what he did for all sinful humanity. Through his body and blood given for us, we now have peace with God (5:1). He's forgiven all our sins—past, present, and future. We now stand in the grace of God (5:2). Through his body and blood given for me, I can be fully convinced that God loves me. We treasure the most sacred sacrifice of the body and wounds of Jesus, more than anything or anyone else.

This intimate love of God for us through the sacrifice of Jesus actually bears fruit in our inner life. Paul wrote: "...because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (5:5). The Holy Spirit gives us love, joy, peace, and all the fruit of character that shape us into someone like Jesus, an instrument for righteousness. Only the gift of the Holy Spirit can produce this beautiful fruit in our lives. This is the power of the grace of Jesus. Think about it. Children of wrath, hypocritical legalists, helpless slaves of sin, changed into people who know God's love. There's nothing more amazing or more beautiful.

And what happens when we personally receive what the Risen Jesus did for us? The last part of verse 4 says, "...in order that we may bear fruit for God." When anyone, through repentance and faith, really gets connected with the Risen Jesus, a miracle happens. We bear fruit for God. It's none other than the fruit of grace. We don't produce this fruit; our union with Christ produces it.

It reminds us of Jesus' words: "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Abiding in Christ. That's our Christian marriage to Jesus. It's not a burdensome, legalistic life. Yes, Christian life has its own painful struggles. But overall, it's a fruit-bearing, incredibly joyful life.

What is this "fruit for God"? First of all, it's the fruit of a love relationship. It's like a marriage where the bride at first doesn't really know her husband, but as she gets close to him, she falls deeply in love with him. As we are truly united with Christ, we fall in love with him. We begin to bear the fruit of genuine love for God (8:28a). In this love, we have a new desire to honor God as God and give thanks to him in all we do (1:21a). In this new love, we are no longer "lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant…lovers of pleasure" (2 Tim. 3:2–3). In this fruit of new love for God, we're constantly being transformed by the renewing of our minds (12:2a). We think based on this love. We begin to rejoice in hope of the glory of God (5:2b). We long for his glory to be revealed above all else.

This fruit of new love for God enables us to "walk in newness of life" (6:4b). In real love for God, we begin to love what God loves, and hate what God hates. With the fruit of this new love for God, instead of loving our sin and trying to hold onto it, now we really *want* to be sanctified. We're not careless about sin in our lives; we're ready to fight for our sanctification, for God's glory.

In this new love for God, we also no longer regard the people around us "according to the flesh" (2 Cor. 5:16). As we walk in this new love, first we see our fellow believers as brothers and sisters for whom Christ died (Rom. 14:15) and do our best to build them up. As we walk in this new love, we also have a

new desire to share the good news of Jesus with those around us still living in sin and condemnation. Ultimately, this “fruit for God” is bearing spiritual children whom we have led to Christ, to be united with him. What a life worth living, bearing spiritual children for his kingdom.

When we see others come alive in Christ, even through flawed and weak sinners like us, we see the life-giving power of his grace. When we see the transforming power of grace, we realize it’s his resurrection power at work in us and through us, not our pitiful efforts at rule-keeping.

To help us let go of our old legalisms, Paul contrasts living under the law with living in a real relationship with our Risen Lord Jesus. Let’s read verse 5. Paul will describe more about this later in the chapter. But here, he just mentions that that life was miserable. Under the law, we remained unchanged and could only live in the flesh. In that state, the law could only arouse our sinful passions. Such a life was torment. The “fruit for death” that we bore in such a life was guilt, condemnation, and hopelessness.

Then Paul points to our new reality in Christ. Read verse 6. In Christ we are “released from the law,” not its righteous moral standards but its demand to earn righteousness. We are no longer “held captive” by it. We are no longer slaves to a legalistic way of thinking, serving, or living. What does our new life married to Jesus look like? Paul says “we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.” Earlier he described it as circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter (2:29). This new life is focused on God’s praise, not human praise. It’s a life free of following mere outward rules. It’s a life free to love God truly and love others truly. It’s a real Christian life like that of our Lord Jesus, who often broke rules when he loved and healed the undeserving.

In light of this, we need to look honestly at how we are serving. Is our serving superficial, half-hearted, the bare minimum? Is it only legalistic, trying to maintain my own righteousness? Or is our serving filled with the Spirit of God, coming from our heart because of the incredible grace of Jesus to us? If we serve full of the Spirit, through genuine faith in Jesus, we will surely bear fruit for God. It really is that simple.

So, do you struggle with legalism? It may seem kind of funny. But it’s a serious issue. Relying on any kind of legalism blocks us from a real, life-giving, fruit-bearing union with Christ. Let’s read our key verse, verse 4 again. May God convince us that we died to the law through the body of Christ, and that we now belong to him who was raised from the dead. May God deepen our genuine union with Christ and dependence on his grace, so that we may bear abundant fruit for God’s glory.