

Romans 7:1-13 “Bearing Fruit for God”

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Romans 7:1-13

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.

⁷ What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.” ⁸ But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. ⁹ I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. ¹⁰ The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. ¹¹ For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. ¹² So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

¹³ Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.

Introduction

I have a lot of “firsts” today, so I sort of feel like a beginner. Today is my first time to preach at Grace City Church. It's my first time to participate in the live streaming worship. And, I should say, although I have preached before, I don't remember ever speaking about this particular passage from Romans.

Last month, I did some windsurfing on Yamanaka Lake in Yamanashi Ken. I also taught another guy how to do it. Three people who saw that wanted to learn also. So, I had him teach them. He did it better than me. He said later, “Through teaching them, I became better myself.” That's right. Through preparing for this message, I gained a new understanding of the letter to the Romans.

When Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome, he did not have the internet. The letters he wrote traveled by either horse or boat. Also, the New Testament was not put together yet. So, I think that this made the letter even more significant.

I met with a friend recently, and during the conversation we talked about whether he is reading

the Bible. His response was that although he doesn't read the Bible, he appreciates the messages about the Bible from Christian people he knows. That's what this letter is. It is Paul expressing his faith in God and the value of the gospel of Jesus to the believers in Rome.

If we try and put a title on the whole book, it would be something like: The Power of God brings salvation to anyone who believes. The power of God is the gospel of God, through Jesus Christ. Key verses are 1:16 and 17.

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, and then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous shall live by faith.'"

I'm especially struck by the phrase, "I am not ashamed of the gospel." Why did Paul say that? I think it was because he felt very deeply what he had been saved from. He was a Jew who was committed to the law of Moses. When followers of Jesus came along, he criticized and even persecuted them. But then he met the Lord Jesus personally, and that forever changed him. He saw his pride and arrogance. He realized that he had been depending on his keeping of the law to save himself.

And so, right then, Paul died to the law. He believed in Christ and began to bear fruit for God. In other words, he started to preach that Jesus is the Son of God. He had given much effort to obey the law of Moses even to the point of persecuting Christians. However, when he confronted the light of Jesus, he came to the realization that the law has no power to save. It does show us the depth of our sin, which Paul understood. At the same time, Paul was given faith to believe in the power of Christ to save. He believed in the cross, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Here we see at least three major points that Paul brings out in Romans 7. When we believe in Christ, three things happen to us. **1) We die to the law. We see that it does not have the power to save us. 2) We become united to Christ. His death and resurrection pays the penalty for our sin. 3) We understand the goodness of the law (God's righteousness).** The law is good because it shows us our sin. It shows me where I cannot meet God's standards. I need the power of Christ to save me. So, in summary, when I believe in Christ, I die to the law, I become Christ's and I understand the value of the law (God's righteousness).

In Romans 7, Paul uses the marriage relationship to illustrate how the law, in this case, the law of Moses, has authority over us. Marriage is a commitment between a man and a woman to be united together. So, as long as they both live, they are committed to each other. They are united together. If either of them marries someone else, the law says they are guilty of adultery. However, if one of them dies they are freed from that law.

So Paul is saying that, just as we are freed from the law of marriage when one person dies, so we are freed from the control of the law through Christ's death. We are joined to another, that is Christ, the one who rose from the dead back to life.

Paul was only controlled or under the authority of the law until he met Jesus. Then through Jesus and his death on the cross, Paul could be released from bondage to the law, which he couldn't keep perfectly anyway, and he could be united to Christ. The result of that was that

Paul immediately began to talk about Jesus as the Son of God. He was Christ's, and he immediately began bearing fruit for God.

Why does Paul use the illustration of marriage? I asked this as I was running. The answer that came to me was: this was a human relationship designed by God for our enjoyment but also in order to bear fruit for God. In order to succeed in marriage, God made an important rule. "You should not have a sexual relationship outside of marriage. However, nowadays this is largely disregarded. The reasoning is that it's too strict. No one can obey this. And those who don't know this law feel that it's not relevant to them. And, even if they know it, they choose to ignore it. They have a tendency to think that if they are careful, they will be okay.

On the other hand, even those who succeed in marriage and keep this law become like a Pharisee and feel that their marriage is better than others'. They feel that they have the ability to obey God's commands. They are still in bondage to the law. They still base their salvation on their ability to be good.

Keita Takagi wrote a book called, "The Truth Is Waiting for You." In it he says this: "When I read articles in the news about murders, I have a tendency to think, 'Why would they do such a stupid thing?' If we really think about it, isn't it better to say, 'The fact that I haven't done such a thing is because I haven't had the same experience as that person. I am no better than the fact that I have been protected from doing it.'" Even though this has many people of great character, none of them can claim, 'I am pure and holy like God.' This means that I, you and everyone in the world are sinners."

Therefore, the law is good, but it has no power to save us in a broken marriage relationship as well as in a successful marriage relationship. When we recognize and confess that, and believe in Jesus to save us from our sin, that is when we die to trusting in the law. We give up on our ability to be successful in our own strength.

As verses 5 says, "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." "Living in the flesh" means when we were separated from God trying to live in our own power, we bore fruit for death.

I heard this illustration. A kitchen knife can cause injury to our bodies. However, it can also be used to create delicious food.

Paul is saying that before we encountered Christ, we bore fruit for death. That is, we wounded people, we caused conflict and broke the law without thinking about it.

But when we believed Christ, as we see in verse 6, the Spirit transformed us and now we want to serve God, We want to serve people. We want to serve the church. We went to fill Tokyo with the gospel. This is the work of the Spirit. The law could never bring about this change. The law would either make a person discouraged because they can't keep it perfectly, or make a person proud and arrogant and feeling superior because they are keeping it better than others. The only way to be saved out of either these situations is through Jesus. He, by His Spirit, can transform us.

Through the cross (the death of Christ), we die to the law. When we believe that, we are freed from the law. We have a new master now. It is Christ to whom we belong to. We begin to

bear fruit for him, and we experience great motivation in serving him.

However, someone may say, "This makes me feel like giving up. The laws are too strict. I need to make it manageable." But the truth is, if we do that, we make the law the problem. This was exactly the strategy of Satan. He tried to persuade Adam and Eve to believe that God's law was not appropriate. God had told Adam and Eve that they could eat from any tree in the garden of Eden, except one. "If you eat from that one, you will die." But then Satan comes along and says (my paraphrase), "That's not freedom. That's too strict. It doesn't really matter if you eat from it."

What Adam and Eve needed to understand, and also we today, is that the tendency to spurn God's commands comes from the sin within us, that was first caused by Satan in the garden.

Look at Genesis 4. This is the story of Cain and Abel. Abel kept sheep and Cain worked the soil. When they brought offerings to the Lord, Abel's was accepted, but Cain's was not. The reason is not clearly given. What we do see is what the Lord told Cain in verses 6 and 7.

"Then the Lord said to Cain, 'Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.'" And you know the rest of the story. Cain was not able to rule over his own sin and ended up killing Abel.

Neither can we. Even though we know the right thing to do, because of sin we don't do it. In Romans 7, Paul quotes the last of the Ten Commandments of Moses, "You shall not covet your neighbor's possessions" Back to Cain and Abel, Cain wanted God's approval just like Abel got it. I'm like that too. I want approval. When someone next to me gets it, and I don't, I get jealous and angry. In my heart, I am killing that person.

The wife of Billy Graham, the famous American evangelist, was asked, "Have you ever thought about divorce?" Her answer was: "No, I never thought about divorce. Murder, yes." Shocking, but true. This is the power of sin that lives within us. This is the kind of people we are. The depth of our sin is great. We cannot improve ourselves, without the cross of Christ.

Through the law, we understand the righteousness and holiness of God. But, we also understand the power of sin to fight against that law. When we don't know the law, we are deceived by the power of sin within us. We are blinded to our sin, and think that we have the power to succeed in our own strength. We don't need God. The interesting thing is that even though we don't believe in the existence of God, when we do have a problem, we tend to blame God, whom we don't even believe in.

When Elaine and I first came to Japan, we began to study Japanese. We really went after language study, everyday right close to here. After about two years, when we were about to graduate, we lost our first child. It was at the 2nd month check-up, and they couldn't find a heartbeat, and realized through the ultrasound that it was only a cluster of cells, not a baby that was developing. We went home. Our hearts were broken. All we could do was pray. But Jesus was in that prayer. He showed us that in our brokenness, he was there. He reached out to us, and said, "Come to me. Take my hand. Let's go together." I also realized my arrogance and pride in Japanese study to the neglect of my marriage relationship. I had been deceived into thinking that my progress in Japanese was more important than my relationship to God or

to my wife. Pride and arrogance had controlled me. I had to confess that. I understood the depth of my sin. God said to me, "Come to me. I know what it means to lose a child. I gave up my son for you. Because of that, you don't need to give up. You can be healed and restored."

It did not happen quickly, but we did experience healing, and a year later, we had a baby boy is now 30 years old, who lives not too far from here.

And so, I say to you wherever you are, "Come back to Jesus. You may be broken. You may be ready to quit. On the other hand, you may be doing well and feel like you are succeeding in your life. Either way, you need to Jesus to save you from sin. Come to Jesus. He's waiting. His cross, his death will give you forgiveness. His resurrection will give you power over sin. You will bear fruit for God.

Let's pray. "Loving heavenly Father, thank you for intervening in my life, and showing me that I need a relationship with Jesus Christ. Please intervene in the lives of these people here, and the lives of those who are watching. Help them understand that without you, they can't go on. Make them yours. May their sins be forgiven through your cross, and in their battle with sin, through the power of the cross, defeat the enemy, and use them to proclaim the gospel. In Jesus' name, amen."