BEARING FRUIT UNDER GRACE

Series: Righteousness Revealed

Romans 7:1-6

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For a few years we've kept in front of us this vision of a healthy fruit tree that has deep roots and bears fruit. This is what we want to be like spiritually. We want to be rooted in Christ, the Gospel, and the Word, but we also want to apply it to our lives and bear fruit! What I like about this vision is that it reminds us that we don't just want to know truth—we want to live it. We want to be changed by the Gospel and the Word of God so that we glorify Him with our lives. We don't want to hear the truth on Sunday, say, "Amen," and go home unchanged. We want Jesus to bear fruit through us. Fruit refreshes us, others, and God. And this morning there are some fun "bear fruit" stickers on the Connection Center for you to take home (2 per family).

Romans 6 & 7 are good chapters to remind us of this vision because he's going to talk about bearing fruit for God (6:21; 7:4). He's teaching that if we are going to bear genuine, good, and spiritual fruit for God we need to live **under grace**—the grace of our union with Jesus, being identified with Jesus in His death and burial and resurrection. Our life and our power to live the Christian life comes from Him by His grace. It doesn't come from us and our self-effort. We let Him live His life through us. Contrary to this grace-concept is life **under law**: a religious, performance-based way of life where we live by a set of rules, thinking we can measure up to God's standards through our own effort and operate independently of God. It's the idea that a relationship with God consists of rule-keeping and religious works. So, already we have looked at how **law does not justify/save** anyone from sin. Now Paul is going to teach that **law doesn't sanctify** anyone either. If you want to bear fruit, it won't happen under law, but under grace.

Many Christians understand they're saved by grace, but they think that they need to work to keep salvation or they think that in yielding their life to God that they're paying God back for what He has done for them in Christ. They still want to try to pay God back somehow with good works. It's the prevailing mindset among the religious groups of the world. Like the "foolish Galatians" (3:1-5), many Christians too, think they start the Christian life by grace but then live by law. So if your idea of the Christian life this morning is that it's like a salt mine—that it's all hard work and rules and do's and don'ts and trying to measure up—my prayer is that God will **set you free** from that sort of thinking today. If you've been living this Christian life in your own strength, trying to do it all on your own and trying to keep a list of commands only to come away frustrated, thinking you might as well give up on the Christianity thing, well, my guess is that you are ready to receive the truth of God's grace this morning. You are ready to be set free from bondage to law and to start bearing fruit for God under grace.

As we open Romans 7 this morning, remember that Paul is building on a statement he made in **Romans 6:14**: *"For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace."* He has proved that **freedom from law does not give license to sin**. Now he furthers the argument stating that that **freedom from law and a life under grace is the solution to sin's dominance**

over the believer. And although Paul is going to talk about marriage, this is not about marriage and divorce. **Marriage is just the metaphor he's using to describe the believer's relationship to the Law.** It's important to point that out because if you're reading this for the first time or haven't studied it out it can be kind of confusing—like where did the marriage topic come from?

And just so you know, I'm going to be using the term "law" in a couple of different ways today. Sometimes Law with a capital "L" is a reference to the **Mosaic Law** and a lower case "law" is referring to a **general, performance-based method** of living the Christian life. The main Law that Paul is talking about is the Mosaic Law. The Christians he is writing too, many of which are Jewish, are still wondering if they should be living under the Law of Moses, but it also applies to any law man comes up with to make or keep himself right with God.

I. THE BELIEVER AND THE LAW OF THE <u>HUSBAND</u>. (VV. 1-6)

7:1 Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives? 2 For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. 3 So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man.

Paul, it appears, is mostly addressing his fellow Jewish, believing **brethren** in the churches at Rome—**those who know the Law**. Of course, however, the whole church body needs to hear this so they are listening in as well. But he's making statements about the law that would've rocked their world: the law justifies no one; the law increases transgressions; we're not under law, but under grace; we're made to die to the law. In our thinking, but especially their thinking, they're saying, "Wait a minute, Paul. If you remove the Law, and people aren't afraid of the penalties in it, won't people just go on sinning it up without restraint? Don't we need a little bit of Law to keep even us believers in check?" See, a lot of Jews looked at the **Mosaic Law** like a fence. In fact, they called it a fence. It was a fence that they thought restrained the people from lawlessness. The Law was also their tradition. Over and over God chastised Israel for not keeping it. They loved the Law. The Law honored in both the Old and New Testaments. The Jews (like the Pharisees) also had a litany of *manmade* religious rules and regulations called the **Oral Law** that God never prescribed or intended to place on them. Jesus referred to the Oral Law as a burdensome yoke and that those who kept it kept the teachings and commandments of men but didn't walk with God. Just because you keep a list of religious rules and know right from wrong doesn't mean you have a relationship with God, right? So when Paul says "you're no longer under law," people were probably upset. But this is the reality of New Covenant truth.

Believers are <u>dead</u> to the Law.

The Law is good and holy and righteous and we can learn a lot from it, but its **main purpose is to reveal sin to unbelievers and point them to Christ (Rom. 3:19-20; Gal. 3:19-29).** But once someone turns to Christ, the "second husband," they become dead to the "first husband" of Law.

This is the point he's making through marriage. Law has authority over people as long as they're living. This is true of any code of law, including Roman Law and the Jewish Law. It is a general principle of law that death cancels engagements. Let's pretend that because I've preached such a long sermon and you're so hungry, you speed over to Runza to grab a burger and fries before you die of hunger. However, on your way there, the fuzz pulls you over and gives you a speeding ticket. You have 30 days to pay that ticket. However, between then and the due date, you die. You never have the opportunity to pay it. At your funeral, are they going to come stand over your casket and say, "You still haven't paid your ticket, pal!" No. Law has no jurisdiction over a dead person.

It's the same with marriage. If your spouse dies, you're free to marry someone else. There's no need to go on living like that spouse is still alive. The law of the husband is rendered inoperative the moment the husband passes away. Paul says, *"the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning her husband."* Only upon death can she be joined to another man, otherwise verse 3 says she'll commit adultery. Well, Paul points out that what was true for the wife is now true for the believer. **The wife represents the believer. The first husband represents the Law. The second husband represents Christ**. If this is true for the believer, how is it possible to be freed from the tyrannical husband of the Law with all of its demands and condemnation? We can't just kill the Law. **The Law is eternal. It can't die. But who can? The woman.** *If she dies*, she is free from the Law and free to remarry another man, right? Well, when the Gospel is applied to us by the Spirit, we too die and are given a new life. That's what we learned in chapter 6. We have been **co-crucified, co-buried, and co-raised with Christ**. He gets into the application with the word "therefore."

4 Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. 5 For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. 6 But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.

Position statement: Believers have been <u>joined</u> to their new husband, Christ.

So we were made to die to the Law through our spiritual union with Christ. After dying, our relationship with the Law is over. We're not partially married to a dead person. We have no more obligations to keep the Law than a dead person (cf. 10:4; 14:17; Mark 7:18-19; John 1:17; Acts 10:10-15; 1 Cor. 8:8; 2 Cor. 3:7-11; Heb. 7:12; 9:10; Gal. 3:24; 4:9-11; 5:1). *Death did us part!* We're not only **dead to sin**, we're **dead to the Law** which **arouses sinful passions** in us—which is another reason why you don't want to try and live under Law—it works against the sanctification process. Paul will share his personal experience with that element next time.

There's a lot of analogies that portray our relationship to God: sheep and Shepherd, body and Head, children and Father, Vine and branches, etc. But none is more intimate than the intimacy portrayed by a marriage relationship with Christ as the Husband of His bride, the Church (Eph. 5:22-33). We're the bride of Christ, **married to Christ forever—never to die again** (6:9). So so far, this is

a theologically dense passage, I agree. But the illustration is fairly simple, and the results are incredibly practical. In verse 4 he says we were joined to Christ *"in order that"* [purpose statement] we might bear fruit for God. The reason for our union with Christ is **that we might bear fruit**.

The reason we were joined to Christ: To <u>bear</u> <u>fruit</u> for God.

The fruit of a marriage should be children—the "fruit" of the womb (Psalm 127:3-5). It's a bit different type of fruit than we're used to thinking about, but this is a truth often repeated in Scripture: unless we abide in Christ/are joined to Christ/connected to Christ, we cannot bear fruit. We cannot bear fruit on our own any more than a person can have children on their own or a branch can bear fruit without the vine. **We have no life or ability or power to bear fruit without 1) being connected to Jesus positionally through faith in Him and 2) Relying on His grace to bear fruit.** Apart from Him we can do nothing—No thing at all (John 15:1-6). This is why it's so important to believe the Gospel and appropriate/reckon the Gospel when we go to serve God in any capacity. **You cannot live the Christian life in your own strength! It's only by grace.**

In Galatians 5, Paul pits the Law and the flesh vs. grace and the Spirit. If you're living by law (any sort of relationship with God that is based on a list of rules or performance based acceptance) you are operating in the flesh (your natural power and sin nature) and we see the deeds of the flesh in your life (5:19-21). So if you want to bear the good fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, etc.), it only comes when operating under grace, walking by the Spirit in the freedom of grace. You must, as Paul said, recognize that **it's no longer you who live but Christ who lives in you** (Gal. 2:20).

But let's define what we mean by fruit: Fruit can be **virtuous, Christlike qualities** (Rom. 6:21-22; 7:4-6; Gal. 5:22-33). It can be **good works** that we do that glorify God (Col. 1:10; Titus 3:14). Fruit can be **people who come to Christ** through our Christian witness or those who grow in sanctification through our help in **discipleship** (Rom. 1:13; 1 Cor. 16:15). We can bear fruit by **giving praise** to God for His grace (Heb. 13:15) or by **giving** towards God's kingdom causes (Rom. 15:28; Phil. 4:17). Don't you want to bear fruit for God? Don't you want to be a fruitful Chrisitan? Every believer will bear some fruit, but we want to see everyone become fruitful—thirty, sixty, hundredfold (Mt. 13:8). But **if we're going to be fruitful, we need to understand grace and learn to serve in the newness of the Spirit**—not the oldness of the letter.

Those who are living under law tend to operate in their own power, independently of God. They try to be perfect. They try to bear fruit themselves. And they're stuck doing the things they're trying not to do because law arouses that very thing. And there's a lot of people, Christians included, who are living under law. They live trying to keep impossible standards, measuring themselves against these standards—many of which are self-imposed on them by themselves or the world or other religious people. Rather than operating *from* God's acceptance by grace, they operate *for* God's acceptance or continued acceptance by keeping a religious minutia. It's a performance-based (works based) acceptance and not free, unmerited grace. And to keep us from that mindset and set us free, I want to **contrast Law and Grace** with you. I know I've done this in the past but I'm going to do it again for the new people and to help it sink in through repetition. You can tell me at the end which one you want to live under, and which one will bear good fruit.

The temptation for people is to think, "We can't let go of law completely. We've got to keep a little bit of law or people will be lawless. They'll do whatever they want." So let's compare.

LAW	VERSE	GRACE
Sin increases	**Rom. 5:20**	Grace reigns/abounds all the more
Sin is your master	**Rom. 6:14**	Sin is no longer your master
Slave to sin, resulting in death	**Rom. 6:16-18**	Slaves to righteousness, resulting in life
Bear fruit for death	**Rom. 7:4-5**	Bear fruit for God
Sin is alive	**Rom. 7:8**	Sin is dead
Sin is alive and I am dead	**Rom. 7:9-11**	Sin is dead and I'm alive
Mind on the flesh; death	**Rom. 8:6**	Mind on the Spirit; life and peace
Power source of sin	**1 Cor. 15:56-57**	Given victory through Jesus
No glory; Ministry of death and condemnation; fading; blinding	**2 Cor. 3:1-18**	Abounding in glory; ministry of righteousness; veil removed; liberty
No one justified	**Gal. 2:16**	Man is justified

Can you see any reason, after looking at that list, why anyone would want to try and live under law? You should at least come away from that with a bad taste in your mouth for law. You should have a desire to live only under grace. If you want to live life by law, you have to be meticulous, keeping the whole thing. And like James says, if you stumble at one point, you're guilty of breaking it all. Conversely, this is why Paul says to stand firm in the freedom Christ has given you. "It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5:1). I would encourage us not to wear a yoke of any kind—be it the Law or any other laws that people try to place on you that God hasn't. Because here's the thing:

Those who are living under grace will always <u>outperform</u> those living under law.

They'll always bear more fruit and fruit that is actually pleasing to God. People who *can* will always outperform those who *must*. Last week I shared the illustration of the two dogs. Well, this week I want to tell you about a trapeze artist and Pistol Pete.

Illustration: Trapeze artist

A young man walked up to a trapeze artist and said, "Aren't you glad you've got that net to save your life when you're up there swinging 60 or 70 feet above it?" The trapeze artist said, "Yeah, I'm grateful the net is there to save my life, but that's not the only purpose of the net." The young man said, "What do you mean?" The artist said, "The reason the net is there is so that we will get better. If I was 75 feet in the air, I would not let go of one bar to swing to the next without carefully taking hold of another bar first. I wouldn't take any chances. But because of the net I can try double backflips and fail and get back up and try again. I get better every time I fail and get back up and go. It gives me freedom to get better." That's what grace does. It saves us but it enables us to get

up and get better. Where sin increases, grace increases all the more. If I step out to serve God in a new way that I think He is leading me, I don't have to worry about failure so much. Is it fun? No. But grace has my back. It will sustain me and I will learn through it and be better because of it.

Illustration: Pistol Pete
Pistol Pete is a pretty famous basketball player. He threw passes that nobody had ever seen before. He made passes behind his back that no one else did and he was good at it. It was awesome. But pretend that a player like him lived under a coach that never allowed him that freedom. He always had to throw the two handed chest pass—arms out, thumbs down. And should he dare pass the ball wrong, he'd be benched. He'd be frozen in fear. His performance would be reduced. But now contrast that with a coach who says to his player, "I'll have to reign you in a little bit at times, but I want you to go out there and play your heart out. Be yourself. Be creative. Play creatively. Learn to do things. Be free!" That player will grow far more and accomplish far more than the person who is forced into a mold of unnecessary rules by the coach who benches them for every little thing. He'll also love to serve his coach! He'll look up to that coach for life and develop a relationship with that coach. Maybe you've played sports under both systems and experienced that.

Folks, there are so many ways that we get caught up in a performance-based mindset of law. Many of us would never admit that we're living under law, but it happens to even the best believers and our service for the Lord is greatly stifled.

1) Many believers today will cherry-pick the **Law of Moses**. They still go back to it to try and find acceptance with God. They can't eat bacon or worship on Sunday or wear clothes made of two fabrics or get tattoos. This is obvious living by Law—the Mosaic Law—and there are Christian groups under the heading of Christendom who live by it still.
2) Many believers today live under **religious standards** that God isn't placing on them (Isaiah 29:13-14). Like the Jews under the Oral Law, these believers are stuck under a religious system made up of manmade rules and traditions. One of the ways you can tell if someone is living under law like this is that they think their religious works will get them to heaven or keep them saved. They're also terrified of change in a church setting. If you change the order of service or don't light a certain number of candles, it throws them off. They have a holy fit over the holy cow's in a church.
3) Many believers live by unrealistic **worldly standards—they let their value and worth be determined by** externals: what the world says about them, what they earn for a living, what they do for a living, what street they live on, what they look like, who they hang out with—young adults and teenagers really struggle with these. But when these things define us and become our standards of acceptance for ourselves, they're law to me.

My law can be that in order to be accepted, I need to be tough. Tough people don't cry so I can't cry. My law might be that in order to be loved, I need to have a perfectly fit, sculpted body. Unless I'm a certain weight and keep my girly figure, I can't accept myself. My law can be my job. Unless I make such and such amount, I'm worthless. Here's one I used to think about: unless I'm a 3rd generation farmer and keep the farm in the family, then I'm not significant or of value. Did you know many farmers who lose their farm commit suicide? Their identity is in their farm. If I'm at the point, I'm not living for God's kingdom but for my own. My law can be having perfect grades

or perfect homeschool kids or peak athletic performance. Laws can be anything we use to try and find love, acceptance, security, significance, value and worth by keeping. They're worldly thought patterns built up by growing up in the world with the flesh and the devil propping them up.

I want you to know today that you do not have to keep living under law and as long as you do, you won't be a fruitful Christian. Those who live under law operate by fear. They're always focused on themselves and their behavior. I call them naval officers because their eyes are on themselves. They don't have time to serve others and when they do, it's for their own browning points with God and not a true love of neighbor. They can be very religious externally, doing a lot of good things, and still not have a relationship with God because law doesn't require it. It just requires performance. can keep all the commandments and still your heart will be far from Him, Jesus said. If that's you and you're worn out from the religious games and spiritual fruitlessness, I invite you to come to Jesus this morning. Come to grace where you'll find everything you need freely in Him. Drop all the manmade and self-imposed standards and get your love, acceptance, security, significance from Christ.

I've been praying this week that God would set some people free this week and freedom starts with the cross**—the old rugged cross**—**where Jesus died to set your free from sin and to have a relationship with you.** The cross shows us that God is holy and someone perfect had to die because we couldn't keep the holy standards. You and I both know you can never be good enough. So come to Jesus by way of the cross this morning. Trust in Him and be saved. But then see your union with Him in it. You died with Him and you are alive with Him. You have newness of life.