

Living in Christ by the Spirit

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[0:00] Let's turn to Romans chapter 7. Romans 7 and we'll read the first six verses. Do you not know, brothers, for I am speaking to men who know the law, that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives?

For example, by law, a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive. But if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage.

So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man.

So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead.

In order that we might bear fruit to God. For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death.

[1:16] But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law, so that we serve in the new way of the spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

Well, if you are a Christian, you want to be godly, don't you? But perhaps as you look at your life, the passion for godliness is all but gone.

Under a series of defeats, in the muck of stagnation, you've ran out of joy, you've ran out of hope for this battle.

And if that's you, it could be you. If that's you, you aren't alone. Let me tell you a story. Walter Marshall.

Never heard of him, I'm sure. Marshall, Marshall, what? We'll try that again. Walter Marshall was a Puritan. He was right where you are at tonight, if that's you.

[2:29] And believe it or not, Puritans themselves got off track, lost their way, fell into a slough of despond. He wanted to be godly.

And it was right at that point where his deepest distress was found. Nothing he ever did was quite good enough.

He had besetting sins that no matter what he did, no matter what he tried, he could not break. And the people he preached to, they were in despair as well.

Some, he later said, were even close to killing themselves. Their pursuit of holiness had landed them in the shadow of death.

Gospel joy was all a memory. And it was during that time that Thomas Goodwin, the well-known Puritan, theologian, pastor, came to visit Marshall.

[3:37] And he heard Marshall preach. And he said, brother, brother, you are trying to get oil from Flint. You're pressing your people for holiness out of their own efforts.

That struck home to Marshall. And then Marshall sat down with Thomas Goodwin and he got personal. He told Goodwin his ongoing fight with sin, his own besetting sins, his struggles and his failures for holiness.

And Goodwin said something very insightful. He said, brother, Walter, you have forgotten to mention the greatest sin of all, not believing on the Lord Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins. That means the forgiveness of your sins and the sanctifying of your nature. And that struck home to Walter Marshall's heart.

And from that conversation, Marshall was a different man. He had been saved. He had been a Christian. But it was like a revival happened.

[4:50] He was a new man. He started to focus his attention, his preaching on Christ. And he started to believe Christ not only for his justification, but also for his sanctification.

He looked to Christ not only to give him peace with God, but to give him holiness. And the result was holiness. And the result was joy in his life.

He eventually wrote a book on what he had found, where he had gone wrong, what he had found that helped. And he called it the gospel mystery of sanctification.

Sanctification. Not very well known book anymore. John Murray called it the best book on sanctification ever written. I haven't read every book on sanctification like John Murray, so I'm going to take his word for it.

And in that book, Marshall laid out the gospel method of sanctification. And listen to what he said. And they that would cure the flesh and make it holy by their own resolutions and endeavors do act quite contrary to the design of Christ's death.

[6:05] For he died, not that the flesh or the old natural man might be made holy, but that it might be crucified.

And destroyed out of us. Romans 6, 6. And that we might live to God, not by any natural power of our own resolutions and endeavors, but by Christ living in us.

We're just saying that. But by Christ living in us and by his spirit bringing forth the fruit of righteousness in us. Galatians 2, 20 and chapter 5, 24 and 25.

Our way to mortify sinful affections, emotions and desires and lusts must be not by purging them out of the flesh, but by putting off the flesh itself and getting above into Christ by faith and walking in that new nature that is by him.

Our willing, resolving and endeavoring must be to do the best, not that lies in ourselves or in our own power, but that Christ and the power of his spirit shall be pleased to work in us.

[7:19] For in us there dwells no good thing. So why do we get bogged down in a pursuit of holiness?

Why do we have so often so little joy? Joy in the Christian life. Joy to evangelize. I think it's because so often we fall into the same exact thing that Marshall fell into.

We know we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone. But we think that our sanctification ultimately depends on our own efforts.

We know enough. That we need God's strength. And so we pray, God, help me, God, I need your strength.

But in our looking to God, which is good, we don't look to Christ for who he is now for us. And so we forget Jesus' words.

[8:22] I am the vine. You are the branches. Without me, you can do nothing. But if you remain in me and I remain in you, you will bear much fruit. We forget.

We forget. And we don't look for grace where God has put it. In Christ. So the life is in the vine.

We feed off of the vine. God doesn't bless us outside of Christ. Grace doesn't have any sort of living reality unattached to Jesus. And so everything that we need for life and for godliness is in Christ.

And that's the way God wants it. Because in all things, he wants his son to be glorified. And so too often we forget that it's just as we received Christ that we receive strength to live the Christian life.

Colossians 2, 6 and 7 says this. So then just as you receive Christ Jesus as Lord. How do we do that? We receive him by faith. Just as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him.

[9:34] Rooted and built up in him. Strengthened in the faith as you were taught. And overflowing with thankfulness. Isn't it interesting? What happens?

What comes from living in Christ? Continuing to live in him. Well, your life overflows with thankfulness.

And so I have a question for you. Does your life overflow in thankfulness? If not, maybe it's because you're trying to live the Christian life in your own strength instead of Christ's strength.

If not, maybe behind your pursuit of holiness is an unbelieving spirit. You are acting continual fresh faith on Christ.

Again and again, the Bible says the pursuit of holiness is done by looking to who Christ is, who he is presently. Ephesians 6, 10. Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

[10:41] Romans 13, 14, which we looked at two weeks ago. Clothe yourselves in Jesus Christ. Second Timothy 2, 1. You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

And we could go on. Where where does the the grace come to live the Christian life? It's in Christ. God doesn't send it to us in a box. He puts it into Christ.

And then he says, now go believe in him. He says, go to him. Live in him. Live on him. Now, Paul has a whole nother way of talking about this way of living the Christian life.

He calls it, even as we sang, living according to the spirit. So you have your Bibles, I hope, open to Romans chapter 7. And in the passage that we had read, we see the connection between our union with Christ, which we have been talking about for the last few weeks.

And this new way of serving by the spirit, living according to the spirit. Now, as we back up just for a moment, Paul is talking about the place of the law in the Christian life.

[11:55] Can the law make you holy? No. So should we just get rid of the law? No. The law is holy, righteous, and good. But then the question is, how do I obey the law then?

How do I live a holy life? And in chapter 7, first six verses, we learn three things about living the Christian life, about this pursuit of holiness. The first thing we learn is that you must die to the law to live the Christian life.

You must die to the law to live the Christian life. The Christian life begins when you die to the law.

Verse 4 says that we have died to the law to belong to Christ in order that we would produce, we would bear fruit to God. Now, what does it mean to die to the law?

What does it mean to die to the law? Well, it means to escape its covenant jurisdiction. And someone says, what do you mean by that?

[13:02] Well, Paul says, let me give you an example. Suppose a woman is married to a man. And as she is married to the man, so Stephanie is married to me, the law of marriage applies to her.

It applies to Stephanie because she is married to me. Now, the law of marriage applies to her.

She's under its jurisdiction. It can condemn or justify her based upon her behavior.

And so if she tries to marry another man, well, she's still married to her first husband. If Stephanie tries to marry her, this is a horrible idea, another man, well, I'm still alive.

The law steps in and says, you're an adulteress. The law steps in and does its work of condemning her. And so the law applies to her.

It can condemn her or justify her based on her obedience or disobedience to the law. And so it is with us. Paul is saying we were under the law.

[14:13] We were married to our first husband, Adam. And through Adam, through our union with Adam, the law, the covenant of works came and applied to us.

So just as the law of marriage applied to the woman through her husband, the covenant of works applied to us through Adam. And so we were under the covenant jurisdiction of the law.

The law could condemn us or justify us based on our obedience. And since we are all sinners in Adam, we are all condemned.

The law condemns us all. Or condemned us all. But something happened. In Christ, through the body of Christ, verse 4 says, you died to the law.

Now remember Galatians 4. Christ was born of a woman. That means he was born of the flesh and blood of Adam. He was born under the law to redeem those under the law.

[15:15] And so Jesus came and he died under the condemnation of the law. He died as a lawbreaker. He died in our place. And when he died, your connection, our connection, as people who are in Christ, our connection with Adam, our connection with the law, was severed.

And so your union with Adam in sin and guilt was severed. And so through his body, you died to the law. And so now the law, the law has no power over the dead.

And through Christ, you died to the law. I've lived next to a graveyard for six years now. And I have never, ever once seen the police cars pull up in a sudden, in sirens blaring and throw handcuffs on one of those people in the grave.

The law has no jurisdiction over the dead. And in Christ, we died to what once bound us.

Now, let me ask you, I want you to think very carefully about this, because this is a very important distinction. Does it say the law died to us?

[16:30] No, it doesn't say that the law died to us. We died to the law. Nowhere will you read in the New Testament that the law is dead, that it's not a living reality for the Christian.

No, the law is the moral standard of God's holiness and righteousness lives forever, because God himself and the law is a manifestation of who God is. He is immortal.

So the law itself is immortal. But so, so the law didn't die to us. It didn't die and go away, but we died and we left its covenant jurisdiction.

We left the law as a legal covenant. And so now the law cannot condemn us, cannot condemn us.

The law cannot label us an adulteress and throw stones at us and to, to kill us. And so we sing, he has hushed the laws, loud thunder.

[17 : 32] He has quenched Mount Sinai's flame. And so what does that mean for you, dear brother or dear sister? It means this, no matter what, no matter how heinous your sin is, if you are in Christ, you're married to him and you are dead to the law, you cannot be condemned.

And some people are afraid to hear that preached. Um, because they think, but if you say that, then, then people will go off the deep end.

And that's what people told Paul too. What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? And Paul's response was by no means. You don't understand this grace yet.

And some people, some Christians don't like to hear that because they can't imagine an obedience that comes from something other than a fear of condemnation.

And so to them, the, the, the life they're living in the Christian life is, is just, they're trying to make sure they stay on God's good side. But Paul says, if you're in Christ, you're dead to the law.

[18 : 47] You're dead. You're, you're as dead to the law as the dead bodies in the graveyard are dead to the law of Indiana and the laws of this country. The law's covenant jurisdiction over you is broken and it cannot condemn you.

And it cannot justify you. You are free from it. And now you can really start to obey all true obedience. Comes up out of love, out of gratitude, out of reverence, but it never comes out of fear of condemnation.

The fear of condemnation can never produce one true act of righteousness. We, we can't be trying to save ourselves and love God at the same time.

So it's impossible to love God and try to make sure he doesn't condemn you at the same time. And so you can't obey the law until you're freed from the law. And that's, that's the gospel. That's so backward to all other religions.

That's backward to so much of how our, our, our hearts naturally want to think, but the terror of the law and condemning us can never produce an act of a loving response of obedience.

[20 : 04] And so we died to the law so that now we can obey the law in love. Now we learn a second thing in this passage. We have been married to Christ.

And this, this is very short because we've been talking about this over and over again. Our first marriage to Adam under the law is over. Our, our first marriage to, to our first husband is done. And so the covenant of works, the law, it's, we've died to it. And now our marriage to the second Adam in grace has begun.

And so verse four says, so my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead.

And so now we belong to another. We belong to the one who was raised from the dead. Yes. So Jesus died, but he was righteous and God raised him from the dead.

[21 : 04] The death, death could not keep him. And so this resurrected one, this righteous one, this one that God looked over and said, he is all together, lovely, perfect, and he cannot be condemned.

That's our husband. And that's who we've been talking about. What we've been talking about the last few weeks. We're married to him. We're united to him. And so he is our righteous, gracious, glorious, good, holy husband.

Who reigns in all power because he's been raised from the dead and we are married to him. Now, thirdly, what is the result of that marriage? What is the result of belonging to him?

Well, you see it in verse four. In order that we might bear fruit to God. We bear fruit to God.

So where does obedience come from? Where does real obedience to God's law come from?

Where does real holiness come from?

[22 : 10] It comes from your union, your belonging to Christ. And so when you live in the goodness and the grace and the richness and the power and the loveliness of Christ, when you're living by faith in all of his resurrection power for you, for who he is, for what he's done for you, the result is you bear fruit to God.

And so our holiness comes out of living out of the riches of who Christ is and who he is for us right now. And so we can write every check of righteousness, every check that righteousness demands. We can always obey because his name and our name are right beside each other on the check. We are married. We're married to the righteous one.

His name, his credit, his power, his abilities lie behind all of our endeavors, behind everything we do. And so what is the pursuit of holiness?

It's laying a hold of all that Jesus is for you. It's believing all that Jesus is for you. It's then obeying out of a sense of that.

[23:25] It's writing the check. It's doing what needs to be done. It's obeying the law and trusting that all the riches of Christ, that it's enough.

He has enough patience. He has enough goodness. He has enough wisdom and righteousness and everything to cover it, to make you do it, to help you do it. So let me put this in a real life setting. Let's take it out of the theoretical and put it into a real life setting. Let's say that you are struggling with patience in a situation, particular situation.

Maybe it's at work. Maybe it's at school. Maybe it's on the field. So where will you get patience from? Will you look to yourself and say, well, I got to do it.

No, there's no patience there. Instead, you look to your husband. You look to Jesus. And you rely on his patience.

[24:26] Now, is Christ infinitely patient towards, does he have all the patience that he needs? Yes. Does he ever lose it? Does he ever lose control?

No. He has all the patience you ever could need for that situation. And so in that moment, you look to Christ by faith, in faith, and you depend on him to give you that patience that you need for the next moment, in the moment after that.

And as you deal with that situation, you have one hand in this world, and you're working with that person. You're enduring in that situation. And you have one hand on Jesus.

You actively believe that his grace is enough for you, that you can, and that he will, that he can, and that he will give you all the patience that you need.

Now, let me ask you, what happens when you live like that? One hand in this world, and one hand on Jesus, both eyes on Jesus.

[25:32] You're not looking to yourself. You're not looking to your emptiness. What's the result? The result is thankfulness. The result is thankfulness. His grace, his mercy, his help, his tenderness, his patience, it all becomes real again to you, real to you again, because you're experiencing it presently.

You know that you don't have what it takes in this situation to keep yourself under control and to live a godly life. And so you're looking to him, and then you find it all in him. And so, you say, thank you. That's the gospel way of obeying, of looking to Christ and obeying. And in verse 6, Paul says, this is the new way of the Spirit.

The new way of the Spirit. And in Paul's thinking, the Spirit is the mediator, is the one, is the mediator of our union with Christ.

He brings us and Jesus together. He's the one that holds us together. And we are baptized by the Spirit into one body.

[26:40] We are baptized into Christ. The Spirit's the means, the mediator of our union. Later in Romans 8, he says, all those who belong to Christ have the Spirit of Christ in them.

He lives with our Spirit to give it life. And so the Spirit brings Christ and all of His resurrection power to live in us, even as we sang.

And so the Spirit joins us to Jesus, and He takes all the grace that is in Jesus, and He makes it available, and He gives it to us. And so Paul says in Romans 8, 3, you can look at it.

It should be right across the page. Romans 8, 3. And so he condemned, he condemned sin and sinful man in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

So how are the righteous requirements of the law going to be met in us? How are we going to obey the law? It's by living according to the Spirit that binds us to Christ. And so living according to the Spirit, serving in the new way of the Spirit, is living out of this belonging to Christ, living out of this union to Christ.

[27:54] It's by faith living on Christ's holiness. It's by faith living in who Jesus is for you. He passed, who He was for you, who He is for you, who He will be for you. That's living according to the Spirit.

And so Paul wrote to the Galatians. And I'd ask you to turn there. Galatians chapter 5. Galatians chapter 5, in verse 16. So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful

nature.

You won't gratify the desires of the flesh. Now look at verse 22. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Against such things there is no law. Then look at verse 24. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

And since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. So through our union with Christ, we've died.

[29 : 12] We've died to the flesh. Christ Jesus has crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. And the opposite of death is life.

And how do we have life? It's by the Spirit. And so living by the Spirit, it's again connected here to belonging to Christ. Christ. And so what happens when we live according to the Spirit?

Well, the Spirit produces all this fruit in us that we see. Love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, all the rest. The Spirit works all that in us. How so?

Well, by taking what belongs to the living Christ and all of His glory and all of His virtue and giving it to us. And so Paul says, keep in step with the Spirit.

And where is the Spirit leading us? Where is the Spirit pointing to us? Well, He's pointing us to Christ. Further into Christ. Go deeper into Christ. He's showing us more and more of the grace of Jesus.

[30 : 13] More and more of what it means to belong to Jesus. How secure we are. How loved we are. How honored we are. How protected we are. What it means to belong to Jesus.

And so now we don't serve out of terror. Always wondering, have we done enough? Have I done enough? But instead, Jesus has loved me.

He has saved me from the law's punishment. He saved me from sin's power. And He gives me all that I need. And so do you want to be godly?

Then live in Christ. Walk by the Spirit who takes you further and further into Christ. Open your eyes to see all of the glory and the goodness and the righteousness and the holiness of Jesus.

And by faith, rely on all of that and all that He is for you. And then obey. It's not letting go and letting God. It's trusting God and obeying.

[31 : 21] Trusting, looking to Christ and obeying. So, Jesus is something. He is someone powerful and good to us now.

And when that happens, when we are living on that, our joy is going to come back because we're going to be experiencing grace, grace, more grace all the time. Even as we're fighting sin, we're going to be experiencing all of who He is for us.

Now, if you're an unbeliever, if you're outside of Christ, if you make no profession of faith, let me tell you about who Jesus is.

About who He is for me, even now. He loves me. He loves me.

When I sin, He forgives me and I sin and I sin a lot. And Jesus is so patient with me. And as I get older and older, I just see how generous Jesus is and how patient He is.

[32 : 31] You, my Jesus is full of grace. I was a teenager and I didn't have a care in the world and I remember being down in the old sanctuary watching an aunt walk around on the blue carpet for a whole hour.

Seriously. That was where I was. I ignored God and I sinned again and again and I didn't think twice about it. You know, Pastor John, Pastor Bob, they preached to me and it's like all the tapes, all the CDs, they're all gone.

It's just, I don't remember any of it. I tuned it all out. So how did I ever get saved? Well, it was nothing but grace.

It was nothing but grace. I wasn't interested. I wasn't listening. I wasn't listening. I mean, does that, you know, I wasn't seeking.

But Jesus sought me when I was a stranger, wretched wanderer, far from home. And he came for me and he loved me and he opened up my eyes to see my great danger and then Jesus just kept on giving grace after grace and he made those promises real to me.

[33 : 46] And so, out of the richness of all those promises, I repented and I believed and it was all of grace. And he's changed my life.

He's changing my life. I'm not what I used to be. And you know what? It's all of his grace. It's all of his grace. He's holy, righteous, and good. But as for me, apart from him, there dwells no good thing.

And so maybe you worry. Maybe you worry you couldn't live the Christian life. Well, I can't either. I'll tell you.

I can't. I can't do it by myself. It's all Jesus. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and he gave himself up for me. Jesus is the only Savior I need from my sins past, present, and future.

He's the only Savior you need. And so trust him. Don't worry about feeling bad enough. Don't worry about getting better. Come just as you are.

[34 : 49] Just as you are. Every grace that brings you nigh, he will give you if you will come. And so venture on him. Venture wholly. Let no other trust intrude. None but Jesus.

None but Jesus can do helpless sinners good. None but Jesus. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, I do pray that you would honor yourself in saving sinners tonight.

That you would honor yourself by making yourself central in our hearts. That out of the freedom from the laws condemnation and the laws covenant jurisdiction.

We would, in love, run in the way of your commands. Your law is holy, righteous, and good.

And in my inner man, I delight in it. And we agree with Paul. And so we ask, Lord, that you would show us our freedom and show us our mighty Savior who possesses everything that we need for life and godliness.

[35 : 52] Holy Spirit, come and take us by the hand again and walk with us. And help us by faith to lay a hold of Christ and to walk with you, to keep step with you as you show us more and more of the gospel and more and more of your word and more and more of who Jesus is for us.

I pray that you would give us grace so that tonight we would begin to apply these things. That at the moment of temptation, the moment of doubt, the moment of weakness, we would by faith flee to Jesus.

And Jesus, you would come and be our mighty Savior and give us everything we need so that we will live a righteous life. and that all our endeavoring and all of our striving would be done in Christ's strength.

Please keep us from being lazy. Keep us from being unholy. Make us to fall more and more in love with Jesus so that we will obey him more and more.

Holy Spirit, do this work in our hearts, I pray. And save sinners. Shoot an arrow into their mind and into their heart and don't let them go until they come to you.

[37 : 10] And it's in Jesus' name I pray. Amen.