

Romans 7:1-12 “United with Christ”

Pastor Bruce Zachary

Thesis: Imagine being married to a spouse who is perfect in all he or she does. At first it sounds wonderful, but your experience of trying to be perfect to satisfy your perfect spouse becomes exhausting. You actually become discouraged, depressed, and you want a divorce. You are trying to do all the right things, and feel that you never measure up. You finally break down and tell your perfect spouse that you can't go on like this; and that you really want to do right, but what you need is to know that you're loved and that your relationship is right because you love one another not because you're perfect in what you do. And your spouse affirms, encourages, comforts, and tells you that is what they always wanted too.

When you are united with Christ, you no longer have the burden of trying to be perfect to measure up to God's standard. In addition, you actually are more productive in God's kingdom, because the Spirit's work in you causes you to be more bountiful in serving God than any efforts to follow rules apart from Christ could ever produce. Let's discover the joy of bearing fruit for God through union with Christ.

Subject: Union with Christ

Object: Unite with Christ and bear fruit

A. Die to the law [1-4].

Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? ² For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. ³ So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man. ⁴ Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ...

In context, Paul had just explained how Jesus' followers are dead to sin, alive to God, and now we serve Him [Rom. 6]. Here he wants us to understand that our service is not by performing the law, but by serving in the newness of the Spirit through our union with Christ.

Do you not know [1] signals something we should know and need to know. *The law has dominion over a man as long as he lives?* [1]. Apart from Christ, you have to measure up to God's standard of moral perfection until the day you die.

Death cancels the duty to perform a covenant [2-3]. Paul uses a marriage example to show how Jesus' followers are set free [3]. If you are married, and you enter into another marriage covenant while your spouse is alive, you've committed adultery. On the other hand, if your spouse dies then you

are free to remarry. Death terminates the covenant responsibilities of marriage and you are free to enter a new covenant. *Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ* [4]. **Jesus' followers are dead to the law, because Jesus already took the penalty of the law.** The law doesn't die, but the believer in effect dies to the law, and is now free to enter a new covenant.

B. Three reasons not to try to please God by the law apart from Christ [5-12].

1. Law arouses sin nature [5, 8-9].

For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death [5]. The passion to sin is aroused by the law.

But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire.

For apart from the law sin was dead. ⁹I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died [8-9]. The law shows our guilt and excites rebellion. Just like the Garden of Eden, forbidden fruit is tempting which produces desire.

When I was a boy, our family stayed at a motel. There were signs all around the second-floor balcony prohibiting people from jumping from the balcony into the pool. If it wasn't for the prohibition, I

would never have even thought of jumping, but once someone said, “Don’t do that” I was tempted to do it.

2. Law does not bring life, but death [10-11].

And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death. ¹¹ For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me. Approaching God by focusing on following rules tends to produce pride, legalism (e.g. Pharisees), and outward behavior without a changed heart. The irony is that by trying to be right with God based on our moral performance we deceive ourselves into thinking that we don’t need a Savior. The purpose of the law is to reveal our guilt so that we receive Christ and life. For apart from Christ we don’t measure up and deserve death.

3. Law exposes sin, but doesn’t provide the power to overcome sin [7,12].

What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, “You shall not covet” [7]. The law is perfect, but the problem is that we can’t fully perform, because our sin nature incites us to do evil. Paul notes the law, “*You shall not covet*” which is the last of the Ten Commandments [Ex. 20:17]. Coveting is primarily an attitude rather than an action, but it is generally manifest in actions. The law tells God’s people that coveting is wrong, but cannot prevent the insidious temptation to think that some person, experience, or thing will make us content. Coveting is

wrong not primarily because it produces credit card debt, but because it tends to keep people from discovering contentment in Christ.

Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good [12]. The law reveals God's holiness, justice, and goodness, and is thus wonderful. The law is like a thermometer, it reveals the temperature but can't control it.

Trying to relate to God by being a perfect spouse to Mr. Perfect is onerous, discouraging, and demoralizing. It doesn't satisfy you or God. Praise God that is not what He requires or desires. There is a better way.

C. Unite with Christ [4, 6].

That you may be married to another to Him who was raised from the dead [4]. You die to the law when you choose to follow Jesus, and thus you are free to enter a new covenant (The New Covenant) and unite with Christ. The imagery of marriage to Jesus is intended to reveal an ideal covenant relationship [Eph. 5:22-33, Rev. 19:6-9].

1. Union with Christ bears fruit *that we should bear fruit to God [4].* The way to bear fruit is to dwell with Jesus [Jn. 15:1-8]. Fruit is the supernatural natural by-product of quality and quantity time with Christ.

Some examples of fruit:

Christ-like character [Gal. 5:22-23]

Worship [Heb. 13:15]

Souls won for Christ [Jn. 4:36]

Spirit-prompted good works [Col. 1:10]

Unity with other believers [Ja. 3:17-18]

Spirit-prompted giving [Phil. 4:17]

As you cultivate your relationship with Jesus, you and others who know you should see increased fruit.

2. Union with Christ bears spiritual service [6]

But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter [6]. Through union with Jesus, we are delivered from the burden of trying to be right with God by perfect compliance with the law. We no longer need to serve God by a sense of fear of punishment, obligation to perform, or trying to earn His favor.

Instead, we *serve in the newness of the Spirit*. Serving in the Spirit is not conforming to rules but conforms to the righteousness of Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit. We are to bear fruit of the spirit, so we serve in the Spirit's leading and empowering.

“If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law” [Gal.5:18].

When you are in union with Christ you know that you're loved and that your relationship is right because you love one another not because you're perfect in what you do. And God affirms, encourages, comforts, and tells you this is what He always wanted too.

When you are united with Christ, you no longer have the burden of trying to be perfect to measure up to God's standard. In addition, you actually are more productive in God's kingdom, because the Spirit's work in you causes you to be more bountiful in serving God than any efforts to follow rules apart from Christ could ever produce. You bear fruit not to avoid punishment, or earn favor, but because you are in union with Christ and stoked by His love for you.

Study Guide Qs

Q1. Review the section, "Union with Christ bears fruit." Where have you grown, and where would you like to grow this season?

Q2. How would you like to serve God in this season? Consider your local church or para-church ministry.

Q3. Discuss some of the benefits of knowing God's commandments in the Old and New Testaments.

Q4. Review the section, "Three reasons not to try to please God by the law apart from Christ. Share what part was most noteworthy to you.

Digging Deeper

- 1. Here is an interesting article about being united with Christ <https://www.crossway.org/articles/10-things-you-should-know-about-union-with-christ/>**
- 2. Here is a helpful take on how to bear fruit <https://www.gotquestions.org/bearing-fruit.html>**