

Bearing Fruit: Before and Now After our Death

5th Sun. after Pent. – 06/28/26 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Romans 7:1-13 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 6 [Literal translation from the Greek] Paul says, **“But now, we were released from the law, having died to that which held us in its control, so that we might serve as slaves in the renewal of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the written code.”**

Introduction

✘ Friends, you’ve all died! Did you know that? That’s what Paul tells the Christians in Rome; what he tells you and me today.

➔ But that doesn’t mean that you are dead now! Not even close. Paul is addressing those who are now Christian, though it’s only been about 20 years since Jesus died, rose, ascended and established the new Christian Church at the time of this letter.

➔ So, they are still wrestling with some of these new realities now that Jesus has become the center of their lives. That’s why Paul writes this letter to them (and us). He wants them to have a clear understanding of the complete 180 degree transformation that Jesus has brought about within them; the same kind of transformation that He works within all Christians still today.

✘ Verses 4-6 in this particular text is really the meat of Paul’s message here, so those verses will draw most of our attention in this sermon as well.

➔ As we seek to understand Paul’s comparison of life before Christ with that after our conversion, I plan to employ the long-standing practice in Biblical interpretation of *allowing Scripture to Interpret Scripture*. That means I am going to be quoting a lot of other passages in the Bible today, which will help to solidify that what Paul is teaching is really nothing new, but it is fully in line with God’s will and plan for our lives with Him today and into eternity.

I. Bearing Fruit “for Death” “in the Flesh” (v.5)

✘ As to our lives before Christ, Paul says in verse five that “we were living in the flesh.” I know, you may think, “So what. Of course I was living ‘in the flesh.’ I’ve had this fleshly body – my two arms, two legs, a head, heart and belly and more ever since I was formed in my mother’s womb and have grown to the point that I am right now.”

➔ But that’s not what Paul is referring to when he says that we “were living in the flesh.” No, he elaborates and tells us himself what he means by this. He says in verse five that “living in the flesh” means our center and focus is “our sinful passions” which are “aroused by the law.”

✘ That “law” is God’s law of what is right and what is wrong as He has recorded it for all of mankind in the Old Testament and which is summarized in the Ten Commandments. This Law; these Commandments are what make us aware of those things that are against God’s will and intent for all of these souls He has given life to in His Creation.

➔ We all know how this works. Just tell someone, “Don’t play with that toy in the bag. Don’t even look at it.” And then walk away and leave that child (or adult) alone. What’s going to eventually happen?

➔ We can’t help ourselves! Our human, inbred, sinful nature has to know what it is. Or tell someone, “Don’t watch that video.” “Don’t take Sally’s money over there on the table.” “Don’t talk about how much you can’t stand so and so....” And what happens? That awareness of the sin; of the transgression only feeds our sinful curiosity and desire to learn more and to test it out because it has now become even more tempting than it was before we knew about it through the law.

- ✘ Our fleshly desires, as Paul says, just naturally show up as “sinful passions.” James Dunn, in his commentary on *Romans* says, “A life ruled by or chiefly on the level of the ‘passions’ is almost certain to be a tool manipulated by sin” (pg. 368).
 - ➔ And yet, as Paul makes sure to teach us in verse seven, the fact that we sin against God’s Law when He tells us we should not steal, murder, lie or slander, covet our neighbor’s things, lust, be unfaithful in marriage, or disobey our parents and other authorities – the fact that we can’t help but sin against these Commandments from God, does not mean that it is the Law’s fault or God’s fault! Paul even asks straight out in verse 13, “Did that which is good (i.e. the Law), then, bring death to me? By no means!”
 - ➔ The fault; the guilt lies squarely on each one of us alone. This sin has been “at work in our members,” as Paul says in verse five, ever since our conception in our mothers’ wombs. Psalm 51:5, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” And in Genesis 8:21 Yahweh says that “the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth.” So as Job 14:4 asks, “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? There is not one.” No, we are all utterly corrupt and unclean in our nature from birth, so that all we can do on our own Paul says at the end of verse five is “bear fruit for death.”
 - ➔ Ephesians 2:3 affirms how lost mankind is in our sin, saying that “we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”
 - ➔ So, because of this Romans 8:8 says, “Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” Why? because of the terrible way that sin develops and grows within us. James 1:14-15 describes the progression after a “Person is tempted...lured and enticed by his own desire.” “Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.”
- ✘ This, my friends, is why the *culture of death* is so blatant; so prominent throughout all of history. There has always been so much murder, war, abortion, suicide; even assisted suicide now, human trafficking, rape, genocide and so much more. This...this is where sin, when it is left unchecked always leads our sinful nature, to “bear fruit for death” (v.5).

II. You have “died to the law” (v.4)

- ✘ But all is not lost. Paul writes this letter not to lead people into despair because of these truths about our sinful nature and the sin-filled world in which we live. No, he wants us to understand the great transformation that God, through Jesus, has brought about within us.
 - ➔ He starts verse four out addressing us all as, “My brothers....” That means that all of us – men and women alike, are in the same family as Paul. And what family is that?
 - ➔ Well, it is the family where we “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.” This is the point of comparison that Paul wants us to see in his example of a married couple in verses 1-3.
 - ➔ Just as God’s Law says that we must be faithful only to our husband/wife until “death us do part” and that only when that happens – when one of the spouses dies, then the other person is no longer bound by law to that deceased spouse and he/she is then free to marry another husband/wife if they choose, so it is for all sinners who are bound, like slaves, by their sinful nature to God’s Law that demands the death of all who are guilty.
- ✘ But Paul says we “have all died” to the bond and slavery that the law has had over us! How? “Through the body of Christ”, that is through His body that died on the cross; His body that hung there, fully engulfed with the guilt of all of my sin and disobedience against God’s perfect Law.

So that now, in His death, my guilt and your guilt has been fully paid. The demands of the law have been met.

➔ In other words, without Jesus, there is no possible way for us to ever overcome sin's draw and attraction. Without Jesus we always fall short. Before we knew Jesus, we didn't even want to do anything except for whatever our fleshly desires and earthly passions wanted. And, in that state, there was nothing we could ever do to address our guilt before God. We really were utterly lost in every way.

➔ But now... now Jesus' death in our place has brought about a massive power switch. That power of sin and the law that enslaved us has been utterly demolished. Romans 6:14 says that now "sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace." And Galatians 3:13 confirms it: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.'" Yes, Jesus became our curse on that cross. He took our debt, as Colossians 2:14 says, "by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This [God] set aside, nailing it to the cross."

- ✘ It is simply mind-boggling to think of what Jesus' death means for you and me and all who believe in Him alone for salvation. 1 Peter 2:24 puts it this way, "He himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed."

➔ Just as I told you when I began this message, "you have all died. But that doesn't mean you are dead now." How is this miracle even possible? When is it that I died to sin and the law? Paul just finished teaching all of that in Romans 6:3-4, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."

- ✘ That's the miraculous; that's the transformative power of Christ's sacrament of Holy Baptism! It frees us; Paul says in verse six; it has "released" us from the bondage and slavery of sin under God's righteous Law, so that just as death means a spouse can now "belong to another" (v.4), so you and I now happily are bound together with our forever-bridegroom, Jesus Christ.

➔ Paul uses the Greek term, "δουλεύω" (douleuō), which means "to be enslaved" in verse six, to describe our new relationship now in Christ. He says that we have been released from our slavery to the law "so that we might serve as slaves in the renewal of the Spirit." I know what many of you might be thinking. Why should we be happy if we are released from one slavery to enter into another "slavery?"

➔ Richard Lenski answers this question in his commentary on Romans. He says that this new relationship of "slavery" in Jesus "is a voluntary slavery of emancipated slaves in expectation, not of death, but of life everlasting, thus a joyous, blessed slavery" (pg. 455).

- ✘ That's it; to be bound to Jesus, though it means we serve and obey, worship and adore only Him; this is the fulfillment of our heart's deepest desire, isn't it? Because, now we are bound no longer in a relationship of guilt and death, but one in which we joyfully are bound to our one true love; our eternal bridegroom, our Savior. And Isaiah 62:5 tells us, in fact, that this is a mutual love affair. It says, "...as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you."

Conclusion: "Bearing Fruit for God" (v.4)

- ✘ So what does this mean for our life here on earth until Jesus brings us into the wedding feast on the Last day? Verse four ends by saying that Jesus has transformed the fruits of our labors

from thoughts, words and activities leading to death, into a life where we now joyfully and daily “bear fruit for God.”

➔ And what does that look like? Colossians 1:10 says that Jesus now enables us, by His baptismal grace, “to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.” And Galatians 5:22-23 says that “the fruit of the Spirit,” who now lives in us, “is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”

➔ And we bear this fruit now to what purpose? In John 15:8 Jesus says, “By (doing) this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be My disciples.” May Jesus, my fellow Christians, fill us and strengthen us every day now, as His beloved bride in His Church, just as Philippians 1:11 says, so that we are “filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” Amen.