



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

The Great Victory of Grace

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Romans 7:1-6

Clint Pressley

7 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.

(Pastor prays)

William Barclay, a great preacher of another age, looked at Romans Chapter 7 and said, “Seldom did Paul write so difficult a passage as this.” The concepts are tangled, the language is unusual and even the illustrations he uses are difficult to follow. But if you spend time here and work at understanding it, the dividends will outweigh the struggle.

I heard a well-known Bible teacher say this week that the Apostle Paul would be horrified by the way he has been deified. I certainly don't aim to do that today, but I do believe that Paul points us to the healing, sustaining, life-giving Gospel of Jesus.

It's all in one word: grace. Grace washes and restores, it meets you and settles you. Grace is a hand on your forehead unfurrowing your brow. It is God saying, “I have made all things new at

the cross of my son Jesus. You are going to be OK because of the cross of Jesus. The worst thing that could happen to you has already happened to Jesus when He died on the cross in the place of sinners.” That's the Gospel of grace, and the Gospel needs to be spoken and respoken into our spent and broken lives. The Gospel of grace must be breathed into loneliness and depression. The Gospel of grace must be spoken into worry and despair and bitterness and boredom. When the baby doesn't have a heartbeat, when the wreck is fatal, when the wayward child doesn't come home, that's where we need grace. The Gospel of grace is so much more than getting saved. It's the air we breathe and the ground we stand on, and today I've come to remind you that: if you are in Jesus, you are going to be OK because of the Gospel of grace. And if you are not in Jesus, I am glad you are here to experience God's grace in Jesus.

The Only Gospel is the Gospel of Grace

Let me tell you some things about this grace.

Grace Makes us Free

Verse 1 is sort of a commonsense observation while verses 2-3 are an illustration from marriage. Let's look at the principle first and then see the illustration. Paul begins this new section by addressing the readers with affection. “Brothers.” And for the third time he asks, “Do you not know?” It's rhetorical. He is assuming they *do* know. Here's the principle in verse 1. The law is binding on a person only as long as he lives. As long as you are alive, the law has authority. But when you die, you can't be a lawbreaker anymore.

This is a universal principle. It is universally accepted as common sense and it's unchangeable. You see back in Romans 6:14 he said, you are not under law but under grace. Now he's telling us how it works, and to do so he uses an illustration from the law of marriage. Let's read verses 2-3 and notice that Paul uses the phrase “release you from the law” twice. *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.*

Stay with me here. It's a legal principle that has a punch down in verse 4. The law has authority over a man or a woman as long as he or she lives. But when he dies, he's released from obligation to the law. In the illustration, the woman's status as a wife has been abolished and

she's been released. I do think there are two things we are released from. The first is guilt. She is released from the law of obligation. And the second is shame. Death, namely the death of Jesus on the cross and our dying to sin, releases us from carrying even the stigma of sin. That great freedom right there. The law of God and it is perfect and helpful and can do many great things for us. But what it can't do is save us. For that we need the freeing grace of God found at the cross of Jesus. Grace makes us free.

Grace Comes Through the Cross

Verse 4 is a theologically dense verse and worth us spending some time here. Let's take that first phrase, likewise my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ. That's an unusual way for Paul to talk about the crucifixion. Furthermore, you will notice that the law didn't die, the believer did. The law of God is still good; it reveals God's righteousness, God's character and our need for a savior. Even Jesus said of the law: do not think that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets. I did not come to abolish it but to fulfill it. But the way he says it here in verse 4, to be put to death through the body of Christ, is a close-run expression reminding us that the historical fact of Jesus dying on the cross is the centerpiece of our faith. And the way Paul phrases it here brings the agony up close and immediate.

This passage reminds us of the reality of God's love for us in Christ by the sheer cost of the blood of Jesus. But the cross is the beginning, not the end. Go with me again to verse 4.

⁴Likewise, 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. You have died to the law through the body of Christ so that, *that's a purpose clause*, you may belong to another; to Him who has been raised from the dead. Put it together now with verses 2-3. So just as a woman whose husband dies is free to marry another, verse 4 says you died to the law through the body of Christ for a purpose: to belong to the risen and reigning Lord Jesus. To belong to the resurrected Lord. To know His provision and protection. To know that He is with you and strengthens you through this grace found at the cross. To know that He gladly looks at you and says "mine."

The close union and covenant of a man and a woman in marriage is the closest analogy that Paul can come up with to illustrate what it means to belong to Christ. The love of a husband or wife is just not enough to adorn the Gospel of grace that makes you belong to Jesus. Jesus

won't disappoint or forsake or irritate or abandon or abuse. He will absorb all the sin you can muster and say the words "forgiven" and "loved." And that grace comes from the cross and binds us to Christ. It does something and it can't be hidden.

Let's finish out the verse and add verse 5 to it. *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.* In order that we may bear fruit for God, and notice the contrast in fruit in verses 4 and 5. Our new relationship with God through Christ enables us and requires us to produce character traits and actions that will be for God's glory. Paul listed those fruits of the spirit in Galatians 5:22. *But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.* And in verse 5, Paul says don't forget your old life. You had sin, the law, and death working as a team to bear fruit for death. And grace doesn't look back except to adorn the Gospel. We don't look back on our old lives of sin and shame and expect to see them covered again and again by grace. Grace comes from the cross and binds us to Christ and can't be hidden. And grace doesn't look back. And that's what this passage is really about, the Gospel of grace.

A Gospel of grace that goes like this: God is our holy creator that has created each of us in his image. This is why we as Christians respect all people, because all people are created in the image of God. That image, though, has been disfigured by sin, the sinful nature that you came into this world with and the sins you have committed. Those sins have separated us from the wholeness of God. We had a really bad problem. God's grace is that He gives us Jesus, who is all God and all man. He lived a perfect life. As a man on earth, He earned a righteousness in our place. He didn't just die in our place on the cross; He lived and fulfilled all of God's laws in our place. And once He had done that, He went to the cross and not only took our sin, He gives to us His righteousness so that any man or woman who turns in repentance from sin and believes in what Jesus has done, you receive the grace of God from the cross. We believe we are saved by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. The only Gospel is the Gospel of grace.

Grace is a different religion

Do you see the newness in verse 6? That little phrase shows up again, *but now*. Let's read the whole verse to get the impact of the change. 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.* This is a new era of redemptive history. A new era of living not as a slave to the law but alive in the spirit. It's the difference between the old covenant and the new covenant. In the old covenant, we were dominated by the flesh, law, sin and death. In the new covenant, at the cross, we have died to the law through the body of Christ and we belong to the resurrected living one. We are in Him, joined to Him that we might bear fruit for God. We used to bear fruit for death but now we bear fruit for God. We were in the flesh but are now in the spirit. We were condemned by the law but we now are released from the law. Verse 6 tells us the Christian life is lived from the inside out, not the outside in. Grace motivates us to live. It doesn't scare us into serving. Grace doesn't have to be nagged. Grace is its own motivator and verse 6 sums up the motivation in the 2 words *but now*. We are released from the law, we reject legalism and condemnation. We are no longer captive; we aren't slaves to sin but servants to the savior, redeemed and loved. We serve in the new way of the Spirit, saved by grace and filled with power, and we are able to face with joy whatever awaits us. And all of this is a product of God's free and sovereign grace found only at the cross of Christ. The only Gospel is the Gospel of grace. Grace makes us free. Grace comes through the cross. Grace is a different religion found in Christ alone.

(Pastor prays)