



Sermon Transcript

April 18, 2021

50 Days of Spiritual Growth

That We May Bear Fruit

Romans 7:1-6

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on April 18, 2021 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio and video version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at www.wethefc.com

Sermon Text
Romans 7:1-12

1 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.

7 What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would have not known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.” 8 But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. 9 I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. 10 The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. 11 For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. 12 So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

Introduction

The key verse in our passage this morning is verse 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.”* Furthermore, the purpose behind Paul’s teaching in this passage is found at the end of this key verse. He is telling us these things, *“in order that we may bear fruit for God.”*

“Bearing fruit” is another way to talk about spiritual growth. Jesus laid out the expectation that one of the marks of a follower of Jesus is that he or she bears much fruit. He said in John 15:8, *“By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.”* There is an expectation here that our lives give visible demonstration that we are followers of Jesus. The kind of fruit that a relationship with Jesus produces in our lives is both internal and external.

I would imagine that if I were to ask you to describe the *fruit* that a relationship with Jesus produces in us, most of you would immediately—and appropriately—go to the *“Fruit of the Spirit”* found in Galatians 5:22-23. *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.”* This is the internal change that a relationship with Jesus produces within us. If this is what is happening inside of us, we should anticipate that this fruit spills out of our lives and is visible to others. Jesus was pretty direct about this when he said that you can tell a bad tree from a good tree. How can you tell? You can tell by the fruit. In other words, it is visible. You can see it. When people see the good fruit of love shining through your life, it is a powerful testimony to what Jesus can do in a person’s life.

This past week, we encouraged you to practice the daily habit of sharing a meal with others. In that habit, you were encouraged to bring others around your table on a regular basis. It is the practice of hospitality. We were talking about this on Thursday night at our workshop on the four daily habits. Justin Earley, the author of *The Common Rule*, said this about this habit of daily sharing a meal with others. “Secularism is not a conclusion; it is a mood. That means we can’t disrupt it with an argument. We must disrupt it with a presence. This is the essence of the table.”¹ Trevin Wax talks about the same thing in a book he co-wrote on how to find hope in an anxious world. He said that one of the biggest detriments to sharing our faith “is the bad behavior and reputation of Christians.”² It is a “fruit” issue—or the seeming lack thereof—and this image is accentuated by social media—and often Christians

sadly add fuel to the fire of this bad reputation. So what do we do? How do we combat this image of “bad fruit” that is out there? He said we need to do two things. We need to live out the high calling of Jesus so that our good fruit provides a counter-argument to what is being portrayed in the media. And then he said, “a lot of evangelism is now happening in the context of Christian community, where nonbelievers can see how the gospel is lived out in love. You don’t need the fanciest arguments in order to win your neighbor to Christ. You need to pray, then you need to take the initiative and strike up a conversation or have them over for dinner.”³ Or as Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. “*Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*”

So keep in mind that what Paul is going to tell us in this passage, he tells us *in order that we may bear fruit for God*. That is another way of talking about our spiritual growth. At the end of Romans 6, right before the verses we are looking at this morning, Paul indicated that when we become followers of Christ, “*the fruit you get leads to sanctification.*” It is the fruit of being “more and more free from sin and like Christ in our actual lives.”⁴ I pray that is true in my life and in the life of our church. May others see Jesus in us. This is the fruit we long to see.

There are three things that we need to understand to help us see how this kind of fruit is produced in our lives. These three things are found in our key verse this morning, Romans 7:4. We need to understand that we *have died to the law*. Then we need to understand that we now *belong to another*—to Jesus. And finally, we need to expect that if we are followers of Jesus there will be a change in our lives—we will *bear fruit for God*.

Before we look at these three things, let’s rehearse the four affirmations that anchor this series. These four affirmations support what we are going to look at this morning.

I am accepted in Jesus.

I am free from the power of sin.

I am not alone, I have the indwelling Holy Spirit.

I have authority over the kingdom of darkness.

You Have Died to the Law

Paul begins verse 4 by telling us, *you also have died to the law through the body of Christ*. The principle that Paul is drawing out here is that we can’t bring about this

good fruit that God desires through keeping a list of rules to follow. If there is anything we learned from Israel's story in the Old Testament it is that the law cannot produce the kind of life that reflects the character of God. You can't make your way to God through keeping a bunch of rules. It is not because there is a problem with the law. Paul says in verse 12, "*the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.*" It comes from God. The problem is not with the law. The problem is what is wrong with me. The problem lies within you. So let's follow what Paul says here.

He begins in Romans 7 by saying "*Or do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person as long as he lives.*" Paul refers to the people he is talking to here as *brothers*. He is talking here to fellow believers in Christ. I don't think you have to limit his audience to Jewish believers — who no doubt would know their Old Testament. Indeed, they would be people *who know the law*. But many of the Gentile converts to Christ were previously God-fearers who worshiped in the synagogue. They too would know—that the Old Testament law, the law of Moses, which includes the Ten Commandments, was a binding covenant on the people of Israel. At Mount Sinai, the people of Israel agreed to the terms of the covenant, which promised them blessings if they obeyed the commandments and judgment if they didn't. This was a binding agreement as long as they lived. The rabbis had a saying that went like this: "If a person is dead, he is free from the Torah and the fulfilling of the commandments."⁵ In other words, death was the only thing that could free them from their obligation to keep the law.

To illustrate his point, Paul refers to marriage. The same holds true with marriage. When a groom and bride exchange their vows, they end their vows by saying, "as long as we both shall live." In other words, as long as they both are still living, they are bound to their vows. And so in verse 2 he says that a woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive. But if her husband dies, she is no longer bound. She is now free to remarry. Death brings an end to their covenant of marriage. Now if she married another man while her husband was still alive, well, that is a different story. Paul said she would be committing adultery. Please keep in mind that it is not Paul's intent to make a definitive statement here about marriage and divorce. Rather, he is using marriage as an analogy or illustration to make his point about being dead to the law. Just like death brings an end to the marriage covenant, the Christian is free from the authority of the law because we *died to the law through the body of Christ*.

This is one of the perplexing questions about this passage. What does it mean that *you have died to the law through the body of Christ*? Up to this point in the book of

Romans, Paul has said a lot about the Old Testament Mosaic law. For example, back in Romans 2 the Jews thought that because God gave them the law that they were better off than the pagan ungodly Gentiles were. They were seen in Romans 2 pointing the boney finger of judgment against their ungodly neighbors, while they were guilty of the very same things. Clearly, they thought, they had favored status with God, a foot in the door with God, because they have been given the law. Well the problem with that notion was that they failed to keep it. Possession of the law was not enough. It was obedience to the law that counts. Paul concludes in Romans 2:23 with some sobering words. *“You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. For, as it is written, ‘The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.’”* As an aside, those are sobering words for us to hear—religious people that we are. Like it or not, people do make decisions about God based on what they see in us . . . the “fruit” they see.

This leads us to some important discoveries about the law itself. For starters, the law is unable to make you right with God. Paul says in Romans 3:20, *“For by works of the law no human being will be justified.”* Instead, here is what the law does. It reveals our sin. At the end of Romans 3:20, Paul says, *“since through the law comes the knowledge of sin.”* In fact, it is worse than that. The law doesn’t just reveal our sin. It incites our sin. It stirs it up. You know what it is like to tell a young child not to touch something and they look at you in a way that lets you know that your rule has just incited and aroused a desire within them. They now want to touch it. In fact they want to touch it more now than when you told them not to. But lets be honest, we are made of the same fabric. It is called *the flesh*. Look what he says in our passage this morning, Romans 7:7-8. He says, *“For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, ‘You shall not covet. But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness.’”* The result of all of this, Paul says in Romans 4:15 is that the law brings about God’s wrath. We are under his judgment.

Douglas Moo said it this way. “Israel, in a sense, stands as a test case . . . What the history of Israel with the law reveals is the inability of human beings to obey God. If Israel, with all her blessings, could not obey the law God gave directly to her, no person can hope to obey whatever law they put themselves under.”⁶ James even suggests in James 2 that if it were possible to keep the whole law and yet fail in only one point, we would be held accountable for all of it.

But now Paul comes along and says, *“you also have died to the law through the body of Christ.”* Do you remember what Jesus said about the law? He didn’t come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. What we could not do, Jesus did. He was fully obedient to the

commandments of God. But then *through the body of Christ*, meaning his death on the cross, he took our judgment—the curse for transgressing the law of God. As Paul says in Romans 10:4, “*For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.*” The law leads us to Jesus. Through faith, we die with Christ and so the law no longer has authority over us and no longer are we under its condemnation. We will hear in a couple of weeks that treasured verse at the beginning of Romans 8, “*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*”

This helps us guard against reducing the Christian life down to keeping a bunch of rules. Another word for that could be “legalism” or “moralism.” It is the idea of obeying God out of our own effort. It was one concern I had about the eight habits we are looking at through *The Common Rule*. You could easily reduce these habits down to some rules to keep and even by keeping these “rules” think that your performance of praying three times a day . . . or fasting for 24 hours . . . or completing some bible reading plan earns you some kind of spiritual points with God. That is not the point of the habits. Justin Earley was quick to point out in his introduction to the book that these habits are not “about obeying rules . . . Rather they are the small patterns of life and organizing them towards the big goal of life: to love God and neighbor.”⁷ This is the change that Jesus brings to bearing good fruit.

You Belong to Jesus

I love this phrase in verse 4, “*so that you may belong to another.*” Keep in mind the illustration of marriage that Paul used in verses 2-3. Now that the “old husband” - that is the law—has been done away with, you belong to another. You have a “new husband.” In case you are wondering who Paul is referring to, he adds, “*to him who has been raised from the dead.*” Because you are joined to Jesus now, Paul says you are able to bear fruit for God. This is a fundamental shift. The shift is seen in that bearing fruit—or spiritual growth—or sanctification (where sin has less power and we become more like Jesus) moves from the duty of keeping rules to being anchored in relationship and love. Jesus changes our hearts and our affections. We now belong to another.

I love Bonnie! We are coming up on 36 years of marriage. Because I love her, it is not a chore for me to order my life around her. It is not a chore for me to do the things I need to do to serve her. She didn’t have to sit me down and give me “the rules of the house” to motivate me to care for her. It is not to say that we haven’t had our hard talks or that there were things for me to learn along the way. But even those hard talks were motivated out of love. Because we love Jesus, it is our heart’s desire to please him.

There are two images that stick in my mind as I reflect on this phrase, “*so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead.*” Each image is critical to understanding how we can bear good fruit for God.

The first image takes us to the conversation Jesus had with Nicodemus. Do you remember what Jesus said to Nicodemus? He said, “*unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.*” Now Nicodemus was confused as to what Jesus meant by this thought. How could one enter their mother’s womb again and be reborn? But listen to what Jesus said. “*That which is born of the flesh is flesh.*” Paul talks about the *flesh* in our passage. In verse 5 he says, “*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.*” When Paul is referring to our *flesh* he is referring “to the fallen human personality apart from the renewing influence and control of the Holy Spirit.”⁸ We have lost the sense of the depth of our sin and our sinful state. Martin Luther put it this way, “All our good is outside of us, and that good is Christ.”⁹ Without the work of the Holy Spirit, our condition is incurable. It is terminal. Without this new birth, we are averse to seeking and serving God. That is why the law cannot save us. We need to be born of the Spirit. And so Jesus says, *that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*

Bearing fruit for God begins with the regeneration of the heart. That is a work of God. I feel no pressure or responsibility to produce that in someone. Only the Holy Spirit can do that. It is my duty to bear witness to Jesus. I have every confidence that his sheep will hear his voice. If you feel your heart being strangely warmed to the things of God, his call on your life is to repent of your sin and turn in faith to Jesus. And he will change your life from the inside out. You will *belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead.* There is no bearing fruit for God apart from the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit who brings us from death to life.

The other image this phrase— “*so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead*”—brings to mind is when Jesus calls Lazarus from the grave. Do you recall that story. The friend of Jesus, Lazarus had died and had already been buried by the time Jesus came to the town of Bethany. When he arrived, he went the tomb where his friend had been buried. He ordered that the stone be rolled away. One can imagine what everyone was thinking. Once the stone was rolled away, Jesus commanded “*Lazarus, come out!*” Upon coming out of the grave, Jesus said, what he is saying to us this morning in Romans 6-8, “take off his grave clothes.” You are no longer dead! You are alive. We don’t have to walk around like we are still powerless against our sin. Why do you still have your grave clothes on? You belong to another! You

belong to the one who has been raised from the dead. You can now bear good fruit for God. You have been raised to a new life with Christ.

Bearing Fruit for God

The last thing Paul says in our key verse is that all he has said up to this point he has said *in order that we may bear fruit for God*. So how do we do that? How do we bear fruit for God? He says in verse 6 that we do it *in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code*.

One of the tensions you have to wrestle with in this passage is what role do the commandments play in the life of the Christian. If we are not under law, are we free from the commandments? And yet, the fruit we bear is a changed life of obedience. So the life we are called to in Christ is not a life apart from obedience. The New Testament is filled with commands to obey. The New Testament talks about obeying “the Law of Christ.” In fact, nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated in the New Testament. So, while we may be dead to the *old written code* we are called to live *in the new way of the Spirit*. So what does that mean? What does that look like?

It means that the change that is brought about in our lives is a work of the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit, we participate in the risen life of Jesus. We mentioned earlier that the Fruit of the Spirit are internal qualities that the Spirit is forming in us. Paul writes, “*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.*” And then he says, *against such things there is no law*. In other words, the old written code, the external rules and laws of God can not produce the internal change that only the Holy Spirit can. It is a work of the Spirit of God in us. Will Timmins said, “That love that God enabled me to show my unlovely neighbor? That was Christ’s love at work in and through me.”¹⁰

To bear this kind of fruit, you can’t rely on yourself. You need to rely on Christ. John Calvin said it this way, “Since rich store of every kind abounds in him, let us drink our fill from this fountain and no other.”¹¹ We will talk a lot more about this when we get to Romans 8. But for now, know that the work the Spirit is doing in our lives is a work that transforms us from the inside.

That is why these habits—or habits like them—are important. They are the means that the Spirit of God uses to shape our hearts towards God and others. Take the four daily habits we are looking at as an example. Why do we do kneeling prayer three times a

day? We want to frame our day around God's love for us. (You are accepted in Jesus.) Why would we seek to share a meal with others once a day? It reminds us that the center of gravity in our lives is relationships, not activity. Why would we turn our phone off for an hour? It retrains us to be present to the real needs of those around us. Why would we read Scripture? It reminds us that our identity—who we are and why we exist—is shaped by God. These are ways we make our lives open to the work of the Spirit in us and this leads to fruit for God.

Conclusion

“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.” My prayer this week is that Jesus would be seen through my life and through your life and through our life as a church family. May we serve God and each other and those we come in contact with this week in the *new way of the Spirit*. In doing so, may the Fruit of the Spirit be evident in and through us—*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*. May more of my grave clothes come off of me this week. May I rest in knowing that I *belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead*. So I already am participating in the resurrected life of Jesus and I have power to bear fruit for God. May he who began a good work in us, complete it!

¹Justin Earley *The Common Rule* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2019) 62

²Collin Hansen and Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra “Collin Hansen on How to Thrive in an Anxious Age” April 15, 2021, www.thegospelcoalition.org

³Ibid

⁴Wayne Grudem *Systematic Theology* second edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2020) 924

⁵Douglas Moo *Romans: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000) 218

⁶Ibid., 232

⁷Earley, 13

⁸Richard Lovelace *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* Expanded Edition (Downers Grove: IVP) 89

⁹Will Timmins “What’s Really Going on in Romans 7?” www.thegospelcoalition.org July 2, 2018

¹⁰Ibid

¹¹Ibid

© *by Dr. Scott Solberg - All rights reserved*

Sermon Title: That We May Bear Fruit!

Sermon Text: Romans 7:1-12

Sermon Date: April 18, 2021

COMMUNITY GROUPS



Getting To Know Me Questions

1. Share how things are going with the first three daily habits: Kneeling Prayer 3 Times a Day, Share a Meal with Others and Turn Your Phone off for an Hour.
2. How are these habits turning your heart towards God and others?



Diving Into The Word

3. Read Galatians 5:19-26. Compare the “works of the flesh” to the “Fruit of the Spirit.” What do you observe? Why do you think Paul says in verse 23, “*against such things there is no law?*”
4. Read Romans 7:1-4. How does the image of belonging to Christ in marriage (you belong to another) motivate you to live in a way that pleases him?
5. Read Romans 7:5-6. What do you think it looks like to “serve in the new way of the Spirit?” How do “habits” help us do this?
6. Read John 3:1-8. Describe what it was like for you when you were “born of the Spirit.” How does this work of the Spirit encourage you as you seek to walk in the Spirit?



Taking It Home

7. What is one thing you are taking from your study?
8. Choose a Fruit of the Spirit where you feel you need to grow and share it with the group. Pray for each other towards that end.