

New Life: Through Death

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[0 : 00] Let's bow our heads and pray for a moment. Our Father, we thank you this morning for our brother Iuta's presence with us.

We're aware that many, many Christians have been killed for their faith in Orissa, even in the last year. We pray for him and for them, that you would bear them up on eagles' wings, give them grace, faithfulness and effectiveness in their witness to you.

We pray now, Heavenly Father, that you would hold out the Lord Jesus to us again, that he would be our life and that we would treasure him above everything else, and that your Holy Spirit might pour his love into our hearts.

And we ask this in your name. Amen. Well, now we come to Romans 7, and if you would open your Bibles, please, 943.

This is one of the most honest, searching, personal passages in all the New Testament. And it is a little bit uncomfortable for nice, tidy Canadian Anglicans.

[1 : 24] But we're going to look at it anyway. And it has the power, I believe this chapter has the power to make deep, permanent changes in us, and I speak personally.

What Paul does in this chapter is he sets up a compelling contrast of two ways, two completely different ways to relate to God, two different ways to live, two different ways to understand the world, and one is the way of the law, and the other is the way of the Spirit.

When I say the way of the law, I mean the Ten Commandments, the moral law, basic ethical teachings that all religions have. The way of the law works like this.

Do bad things, you're going to get it. Do good things, you'll be rewarded. Do bad things, you'll be punished. Do good things, you'll be accepted.

There's only one problem with that equation. Me. Because all the external rules and principles and wisdom in the world cannot change my heart.

[2 : 36] They cannot renovate or give me a new life, my inward life. There's nothing wrong with the law. It's because of my own irrational, stubborn sinfulness, and yours as well.

And Christianity alone, amongst all the world religions, teaches that the law strategy is futile. Christianity doesn't just say, do bad things and you'll be punished.

It says, Christ was rejected and punished for the bad things that I've done. It doesn't say, doesn't say do good and you'll be accepted by God. It says, you have been accepted by God.

Now get out there and do good. Before we dive in, we've got to see chapter seven for where it is in Romans. You may know that this chapter, actually these chapters, five to eight, this section in Romans, is a happy hunting ground for some of the craziest Christian teaching in the world.

Some people take these chapters to teach that you can be a sinless, lead a sinless and perfect life here and now. Others say that we can be healthy and wealthy as long as we believe hard enough and just follow their five steps for \$299.

[3 : 57] Others say sin is no big deal. God accepts me as I am and affirms me in my behavior. Others say law, we're not under law, we're under grace, so I can drive like I want to.

And what all these silly ideas have in common is they'll take one phrase or one verse or one word out of context. And you know, you know what it's like when you're taken out of context?

I don't like it and I don't think God appreciates it either. And a text out of context is a pretext for a proof text. So in 30 seconds, let me give you our context.

In chapters 1 to 4, the Apostle Paul has shown us salvation through Christ. In chapters 5 to 8, he shows us salvation in Christ.

Chapters 1 to 4, what Christ has done for us and now these chapters, what Christ does in us. And the key thing that holds chapters 5 to 8 together is our union with Christ.

[5 : 05] Every Christian person, everyone who has faith in Jesus, is in Jesus Christ. We are united to Christ. Christ.

And this is, this is a truth that is so remarkable and amazing that it's very difficult to get a hold of. And I preached on this two weeks ago at the 9 o'clock service.

And if you'd like to get a hold of that, you can. But I'm not advertising myself, just that we went through this in detail. This is the normal way Christians talk about themselves.

I am in Christ. You are in Christ. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. We are one body in Christ.

And when you get to the last chapter of Romans, Paul speaks about Christian after Christian after Christian. Even some of his relatives who were in Christ before him, that is, became Christians before him.

[6 : 05] my prayer this morning is that as we look at this, God will change our understanding of ourselves. Set our lives on a different way with real change.

And I'm not going to do this in detail, but I just want to race through the fact that the New Testament gives us four pictures of what it means to be in Christ. It's such a beautiful idea. The four pictures are spatial.

when we come to faith in Jesus Christ, God places us into him. That's what chapter 6 teaches. We are clothed with Christ so that where Christ is, we are.

And where we are, Christ is. And so intimate and personal and real is our union with Jesus that the New Testament uses spatial language to describe it. That's the first image.

The second is a gardening image. Jesus says, I am the vine and you are the branches. We have an organic living bond with him and just as the life of the vine throws through the branches and bears fruit, our whole spiritual life and existence comes from Jesus and his life and so the way of the Christian is to abide in him and remain in him and draw our life from him.

[7 : 16] That's the second picture. The third is a medical picture. The word united in chapter 6 means literally the edges of a wound that stitch together, bind together as someone heals or a broken bone where the frayed edges join together and the idea is that we grow closer to Christ and stronger, strengthened by him all the time.

And the fourth picture is the relational picture. Jesus prayed for us in John 17, those who had come to believe after he died and rose again that they may all be one.

He says, just as you, Father, are in me and I in you that they may also be in us so that the world may believe you've sent me.

It's just amazing. The fellowship, the participation, the unity that the Father and the Son share together become ours by union with Jesus Christ.

So there it is. There are the four pictures. Now, my question simply is this before we move on. Is that the deepest way you think about yourself?

[8 : 24] Do you think about your life in these terms, that you're in Jesus Christ in these ways? It's a great privilege. And if we ask the question, why does Paul go here in Romans?

The answer is very simple. Justification by faith is not an end in itself. It's not the final thing. Justification is how we are placed into Jesus Christ.

Why is that so important? It's important because the power of transformation of living out the love of Christ, as our brother said, the real change in our lives doesn't come from effort and application and intelligence for all the practical commands in the world.

It comes from the person of Jesus Christ through us. Because of our union with him, his life, his nature, nourishes us and reshapes us and changes us day by day.

That is why there's no such thing as justification without sanctification. You can't be reconciled to God without being renewed because when we're reconciled, we are placed in Jesus Christ.

[9 : 30] Yes, yes, yes. The painful truth of the Christian life is we live between Jesus' resurrection and our resurrection. We are adopted as children, but we still wait for the full adoption.

We are forgiven of our sins, but we still sin. But being in Christ means a new identity has been conferred on me. A lifelong, life-absorbing relation to God and Jesus Christ and that new identity does not fit you very well to fit into Canadian culture.

In the biggest survey of teens in North America conducted just recently, the quality most teens associate with God is niceness.

Religion is pleasant and beneficial, but it can't possibly make any real change in my life on Monday morning. And so important is the radicalness of being in Christ that at the start here of chapter 7, the Apostle Paul gives us a fifth picture of what it means to be in union with him and it's marriage. So you can all take a deep breath because I finally got to the text. So we're now starting on Romans 7 and if you have this bulletin, I've thrown the passage out and structured it for those who might be visual learners, if you find it helpful, that's great.

[10:59] If you don't, don't worry. And if you can have the Bible in one hand and the bulletin in another, you'll be a really good Christian. Thank you for laughing at that. You can see it's a perfect little illustration in the first six verses, a principle, an illustration, and an application.

Let's look at the three of them. First principle, do you not know, brothers and sisters, I'm speaking to those who know the law. The law is binding on a person only so long as he lives. Very simple. Death severs all ties.

It ends all obligations. When you die, you go beyond the reach of any law possible. This is a book that was recommended to me by a friend who's in the congregation now and I won't embarrass him. It's by a guy called Thomas Lynch who is an undertaker from a town in Michigan. It's actually a beautiful book. He says this about his job as an undertaker.

The central fact of my business is that there is nothing, once you are dead, that can be done to you or for you or with you or about you that will do you any good or harm.

[12:10] Which is not to say that the dead don't matter. They do, they do, they do. Last Monday morning Milo Hornsby died. Mrs. Hornsby called at 2am to say Milo had expired.

Would I take care of it? In a moment, in a twinkling, Milo has slipped irremediably out of reach beyond Mrs. Hornsby and the children, beyond the women at the laundromat he owned, beyond his comrades at the Legion Hall, the Grand Master of the Masonic Lodge, his pastor at First Baptist, beyond the mailman, beyond the zoning board, the town council, the chamber of commerce, beyond us all, and any treachery or kindness we had in mind for him.

Death severs all ties. And Paul pushes this home to us by using this word the law is binding and I've put it in bold and every word in the passage that relates to this idea I've put in bold it is the idea of Lord.

It comes from the same word it's calling Jesus Lord. There is a way in which the law holds us captive. Before we are united to Christ the law dominates our vision the law masters us.

So there the principle is clear if you die you go beyond the reach of the law. Second illustration verses 2-3 Now like all illustrations we must not get hung up on the details.

[13:43] It's not an allegory. The point is simple and it moves us forward. If two people are married and one spouse dies the remaining spouse is free from the marriage bond to marry another person.

Paul is not trying to give teaching on divorce and remarriage. He's simply pointing out when death severs a marriage it opens the door to a new relationship and it's this new relationship that now becomes the focus in the passage.

And it's very interesting Paul does not use the usual word for marriage. If you look on the bulletin sheet I've translated as joined to. So you see in verse 3 that the woman will be called an adulteress if she is joined to another man while her husband is alive.

But if her husband dies she's free from that law and if she marries she is joined to another man and she is not an adulteress. It's all the same idea. And the reason Paul focuses on this is because death is less than half the story for the Christian.

And you can see where he's going can't you? Christ has died to the law Christ has died to sin so to be joined to Jesus Christ in a new life it'll be every way better than the old.

[14:59] Thirdly then the application and if you look down the last half of the passage is all application and what he does now is he really gets to this contrast between the way of law and the way of the spirit.

Verse 4 is the pivotal verse likewise my brothers speaking to the Christians in Rome brothers and sisters you also have died to the law how through the physical body of Christ why so that you may be joined to another to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God the closeness and unity and connection that we have with Jesus Christ is such that when he was physically nailed to the cross and died we died in him with him through him or as it says in chapter 6 we were co-crucified with Christ in Jesus Christ literally it reads we have been put to death to the law by God that means that the law has no claim on us anymore do you understand it

doesn't mean the

Ten Commandments are irrelevant to the Christian doesn't mean God's changed his mind on the Ten Commandments listen carefully it means we are free from the authority of the law to condemn us and we are free from the powerlessness of the law to change us inwardly the Ten Commandments were written by the finger of God on tablets of stone at Sinai and they are a package deal you can't say to God look I'm good with seven but three I'm not sure about those if we fail to keep the law at one point we fail the whole law and when we fail the very righteous holy brilliant law of God which we now delight in Mr.

Law comes to us and says you've not kept me entirely you're a guilty person you've sinned you stand condemned you deserve to die what Paul has been laboring for a few chapters is in his body on the cross Jesus took the condemnation for us he took all the legal demands of the law and he nailed them there all the written requirements of us for all who are in him and here is the point that death opens the door to a new life to be joined to Jesus Christ who Paul says has been raised from the dead a life that is not just marked by struggle and effort gritting our teeth to get a little bit better every day but the life of God flowing through us it's the life of heaven changing what we desire changing our ambitions changing what we think what we do and what we say it's the resurrection life of God through the Holy Spirit in our hearts if you look on the front of the bulletin

I've put in boxes the three so that so that in order that the first one in verse 4 says if you have been joined to another you've died for the Lord been raised with Christ in order that we may bear fruit for God there is more to the Christian life than justification and forgiveness if we died to the Lord if we've been justified it is so that we may be joined to another and that union is a permanent eternal union because Jesus shares his eternal and permanent life with us and now that it's Christ in me Paul says that's going to have a very practical and concrete effect it is in order that we may bear fruit for God and fruit does not come by obeying external rules it flows from the inward life outside and the New Testament teaches again and again and again that no fruit means there's no life in the person no life no fruit no fruit no life if you have your Bible open just hold your finger in Romans 7 for a moment and turn left turn back to John's

[19:22] Gospel chapter 15 very familiar words John 15 verse 4 I make page 901 this is Jesus speaking he's using the vine and branch idea here he says abide in me and I in you as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine neither can you unless you abide in me down to verse 8 by this my father is glorified that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples and then verse 16 you did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide isn't that stunning and fruit is not just some airy fairy vague idea fruit is very specific it's the entire kaleidoscope of Christian godliness and holiness shown in very specific words thoughts and actions keep your finger in

Romans 7 turn right to the book of Titus I'm sorry about this for those of you who are wanting to hold hands with the person next to you that's the way it goes Titus is on page 998 and 9 I wanted to show you this because this is also from the Apostle Paul chapter 3 verse 1 the Apostle Paul is writing to this guy who's on the island of Crete and he's telling him to remind Christians to be submissive to rulers and authorities to be obedient to be ready for every good work to speak evil of no one to avoid quarreling to be gentle and to show perfect courtesy toward all people that make a world a different place verse 5

God saved us not because of works done by us in righteousness but according to his own mercy by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the spirit whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior so that being justified by grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life saying is trustworthy and I want you to insist on these things that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works and finally verse 14 let our people learn to devote themselves to good works so as to help cases of urgent need and not be unfruitful so you see the fruit of the life of Christ is good works but good works are not just being non judgmental and nice it includes all godly actions and thoughts and words attending to the needs of the poor being steadfast in prayer sexually pure when you are aching to be disobedient working for unity in the body of Christ being perfectly courteous to all not speaking evil of any giving generously financially to gospel causes and to good causes in the community planning your calendar around your

Christian commitments not expecting others to serve you but picking up the towel of servanthood and actively serving others whether they can repay you or not this is a completely different way

from the way of law verse five says the way of law is do good or else you'll get it but that just does not change my heart what it does in me is it stirs up creative rebellion if I can tell a personal story I went to an incredibly strict high school in Sydney it was an outpost of empire really with regular canings and one teacher dedicated to the sole purpose of discovering boys who had done something wicked like having their hands in the pocket and caning them and my ears heard the commands don't touch that sit up straight get a haircut

Shirley Temple but my heart was completely unmoved didn't transform me into a good person you know what it taught me to do it taught me to conform outwardly and how to play the system that's why it's impossible to please God outside of Jesus Christ of course those who do not belong to Christ are highly ethical can be altruistic in a way that puts many of us to shame but their good deeds and their works which we admire and affirm and want to emulate they do not come from the risen life of Jesus Christ flowing through them and therefore they cannot please God in the good that they do they're not seeking to glorify Christ or treasure him above all things I mean you can deny Jesus by being very bad and you can deny Jesus by being very good but all the well-motivated moral behavior done outside of

[25 : 36] Jesus Christ may be admirable and we're thankful for it but it cannot please God because it doesn't come from our union with Christ as Paul says later on in Romans chapter 14 whatever does not proceed from faith is sin the reason is because God is not interested in nice well-cultivated and adjusted citizens he's interested in us he wants our hearts our love imagine a marriage where one spouse never breaks any laws cleans the house once a week takes care of the car but never ever communicates with the other spouse ignores the spouse even when he's spoken to never speaks never listens all the vacuuming and cleaning doesn't change the fact that he's treating her no better than a block of wood that's the way of the law and Paul says we have died to that way of life down the bottom the last so that so that so this is

I'm on the front of the bulletin we serve in the new way of the spirit literally we serve in newness of spirit and not in oldness of letter there are two words in Greek for new one means new in time recent modern the other means new in nature unexpected surprising wonderful amazing and this word is the second we serve in this newness of the spirit it's the opposite of oldness of the letter remember please Paul is describing the ordinary Christian person the person in Jesus Christ the life of the spirit in us is the life of heaven the life of Christ in heaven flowing through us it's new it's new wine fermenting and it cannot be held in the old wineskins of the law it's the new covenant with the Holy Spirit living within us who communicates and conveys the very life of

Christ into us and he teaches us to sing a new song and he gives us a new hope for new heavens and a new earth because every single person who is in Christ Jesus is a new creation a new creation in Christ we become different people than we were we live out of that and we grow to become more like Christ and again I say that will not necessarily help you fit in today it won't outfit you or form you very well for Canadian culture or your children it may deform you in some ways from our culture because as you grow to know him and to love him what you think is the highest best and brilliant and beautiful will change I cannot tell you personally how helpful this has been for me I lived the life of a Pharisee for a very long time I was a miserable legalist putting on a very good face outwardly but there was no real joy or intimacy or pleasure in my relation with God and Christ himself was nowhere close to the centre of my affections and I know

I've spoken to many of those raised in Christian families and raised in the church it's very easy to get into this working for approval and I was stuck in a cycle for many years that went like this I was struggling with sins and I'd fail and I'd ask for forgiveness and I'd make all promises to God and I'd fail and I just nothing really changed and it was hard after a while not to become cynical that real change was even possible and I found the promises of the Bible tormented me I found my friends who were pagans who became Christians suddenly had something that I didn't and I was climbing the wrong ladder I was pushing the wrong door I was trying to relate to God based on my performance it just wasn't working I was perfectly orthodox I could tell you all about Jesus but Jesus didn't fill my heart with vision I mean I was passionate about lots of things but I wasn't passionate about

Christ and his glory and it was reading and studying this section in Romans when I was in my third year training to be minister where God held out to me the Lord Jesus Christ and the freedom which my friends had and the very reality of the life that God is holding out to us now through Romans it's the freedom simply of being in Christ of drawing our true life and our true identity from him by faith

walking in the newness of the spirit and I do not want to give you the impression that it's easy natural and effortless anyone tells you the Christian life is effortless they are deluded there is still great struggle in a conflict which we'll hear next week from the Apostle Paul and in my life I pull the curtain back every now and again there's Mr.

[30 : 51] Pharisee lurking around he makes regular appearances you've probably seen him from time to time what's really changed for me though is the focus of the struggle and the means of the struggle the way of growth is not the treadmill of trying hard and effort even though there's massive trying and struggle in the Christian life but the real growth is daily crying out to God for his help and to the Holy Spirit looking to Christ through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us living in Christ living for Christ living through Christ and of course the question I need to ask you is does that describe you do you experience the life of God within you do you experience Christ giving you fresh ambitions and fresh desires wanting to love him more wanting to treasure

Christ above everything else giving you a strange desire to be with other Christians to give yourselves in love and to serve willingly and extravagantly to do good works not so that you'll get approval because that's what Jesus would want this morning God holds out the Lord Jesus Christ to you take hold of him by faith enter into him live in him and let him live in you and so walk not in the oldness of the letter but in the newness of the spirit let's pray let's pray follow this