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Enjoying God Ministries

Romans #27

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Your Life Matters to God

Romans 7:1-13

I've been profoundly affected these past few weeks by something in Paul's language here in Romans 7. I didn't at first give it much attention, as I was focused on trying to make sense of what he says about the law and our relationship to it. But there it was, in ***Romans 7:4***.

“in order that we may bear fruit for God”

Think about what this means. Go deep into the text with me today. Don't skirt around the edges or skim over its top. Dig deeply into the implications of this statement. Quite simply Paul is saying that your life matters to God. Let me say that again. Your life matters to God. What God has done for you and me through Jesus Christ in saving us and making us his children and bringing us into his kingdom and under his lordship is designed to enable us to “bear fruit for God.”

Most of you have given some thought, at some point during the course of your life, to the question of whether your existence on earth actually makes any difference. In fact, those who ultimately commit suicide will often leave written in a note that who they are and what they do makes no difference to anyone else. Their lives simply have lost all meaning and value, so why continue to live and breathe and take up space on planet earth. But here Paul is saying that your life matters profoundly to God.

You may never have much of an impact beyond your family or circle of close friends or beyond the church of which you are a part. You probably will never be known in France or have any influence in Pakistan or be noticed in the halls of the Kremlin in Moscow. But your life matters ***to God***. Your existence matters to God. What you think and how you speak and what you do with your time and how you interact with others all matter to God.

I can easily say to you today, “The life of Sam Storms will likely never have any effect on the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin. Neither your life nor my life will find its way into the history books that people decades or centuries from now will read.” When I die, probably sometime within the next 20 or 25 years, the world will go on pretty much the same as it does today. People will attend my funeral service. My family will on occasion visit my gravesite. Some will pull out pictures from the past to reminisce. But in all likelihood, both you and I will eventually be forgotten by the generations that follow us.

That may sound horribly depressing, but it is reality. But this is what you need to remember. Your life matters to God. Nothing you do in his power and for his glory will ever fade from memory in the kingdom of heaven. Every second of your existence on this earth is designed by God for you to seize with a view to bearing fruit for his name, for his glory, for the advancement of his kingdom.

I know this must sound outrageous to many of you. You simply can't bring yourself to believe that *the anonymity of your existence* can have any lasting importance in the grand scheme of the universe and God's purposes for it. But I'm here to tell you today that you are wrong. How you think about God and the way you represent him to others matters profoundly. God wants you to "bear fruit" for him. He has saved you and forgiven you and placed his Holy Spirit in you so that you can "bear fruit" for him. The "fruit" Paul has in mind isn't described in detail, but we know what it is from other places in Scripture.

In 1 Corinthians 10:31 Paul said, "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). Don't rush past this statement. I find it interesting that Paul doesn't refer to grandiose acts of public interest, the sort of activities or deeds that captivate a nation or make their way into the local newspaper or appear as a line item on the internet. He speaks of the entirely mundane acts of eating and drinking. If that didn't capture your attention, he goes on to say, "*whatever* you do, do all to the glory of God." Whatever. Everything. All things. Working, sleeping, playing, conversing, traveling, thinking, praying, singing, drinking a Diet Coke at lunch or eating a steak at night, watching TV with your kids or playing Monopoly with friends. Everything that we are and everything we do should be done to the glory of God.

Don't rush past the purpose of this "fruit" we are to bear. It is not for personal gain or fame. It is "*for God.*" It is for his glory. His praise. His fame. Paul describes it in more detail in Philippians 1:9-11. There he says,

"(9) And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, (10) so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, (11) filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God" (Phil. 1:9-11).

If you haven't ever thought of your life in these terms, do so today, right now. *You exist so that your life might be "filled with the fruit of righteousness" for "the glory and praise of God."* Your life matters to him. His desire for each of you, no matter how gifted or good or talented you may be, is that your life bear fruit to his glory and praise. It is the "fruit of righteousness" that your life produces through the grace and power of Jesus Christ that serves to magnify how good and glorious and precious God is.

That is why your life matters to God. I don't care if you don't think it matters to anyone else. In fact, no one else may ever notice you or take note of how you live and speak. They may not praise you or think that you're having much of an impact. I pray that this never happens, but you may walk into and out of a church service on Sunday and no one takes note of your presence. They don't see you, greet you, or pay any heed to who you are. But your life matters *to God*. The "fruit" your life produces by his Spirit serves to shine a light on the splendor of who he is.

I was struck once again by this truth as I stood in Barnes & Noble on Friday afternoon, looking over the extensive section that contained biographies of famous and influential people. My guess is that not one of us will ever have our lives chronicled in a book and sold at Barnes & Noble. Our notoriety is limited. Our power is minimal. Our influence on masses of people is quite small. But though there may never be a book on our lives that makes the NY Times Bestseller list, *our lives matter to the only person who matters*. Our lives matter to God!

Having said that, I assure you that if your life is bearing fruit for God, it is undoubtedly having a massively significant impact on others. You may not see it or know of it in this life, but by bearing fruit for God you are drawing people into the orbit of his influence.

That place in space that you occupy, the air you breathe, the time you spend on earth and whatever it is you think about and do, all is designed to “bear fruit” so that God would be seen as marvelous and worthy and honorable and one to be honored, thanked, adored, and praised.

If this sounds grandiose to you, in one sense it is and in another sense it isn't. It isn't particularly grandiose because no one else beyond your immediate circle of family and friends may ever see it or say anything about it. But it is profoundly grand and glorious because the God of the universe takes particular and special notice of everything: every thought that passes through your head, every impulse of your heart, every blink of your eyes, every word that you speak, every journey that you take, every dollar that you spend, and every minute that you continue to breathe. And he has given all of that to you so that by his grace and through the power of the Holy Spirit you might “bear fruit” for him, for God. Your life matters to God.

“Wait a minute, Sam. Are you saying that I matter to God? I'm nothing. Hardly anyone even knows my name. I don't have a lot of education. I'm not particularly attractive. I'm not wealthy. No one ever asks me for my opinion. When I speak up most people turn a deaf ear to me. They rarely listen. But you say I matter to God?” Yes. You, regardless of how you may be viewed or esteemed or ignored by other human beings, you are able to “bear fruit” for God! For God! You matter to him.

Let's dig a little deeper into the sort of “fruit” that Paul has in mind? Is this a reference to the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23)? Yes. You may have thought that the “fruit of the Spirit” in your life would only affect your relationship with other people, but that it could hardly be a means for glorifying God. But consider this.

When you *love* others in spite of the fact that they may be and act unlovingly toward you, you display how God is sufficient for all you need and you don't require that others love you back. He is glorified through your love. You love others “for God.”

When you experience *joy* in spite of hardship and disappointment and pain, you display God's abundant sufficiency. Your joy is “for God.” When you experience *peace* in times of chaos and turmoil and you refuse to let your heart be shaped by society and its problems, you make it known that God is your Lord and your hope. Your peace is “for God.”

When you bear the fruit of *patience* in not getting angry or frustrated when things don't go your way at the time you want them to, God is seen to be enough for your heart, adverse circumstances notwithstanding. When you bear the fruit of *kindness*, especially toward those who are mean and unkind to you, it is immediately clear that God has been kind to you and his kindness is what makes possible your kindness and in that he is honored and glorified.

When you display *goodness* and *faithfulness* and *gentleness* and *self-control* people can instantly see that something beyond mere human nature and human will power is at work in you to do things that we don't expect people to do. And in that "fruit for God" he is put on display as the supreme treasure and the all-sufficient savior of your soul. If you have him you don't need others to treat you with love, peace, patience, kindness because God is enough for you.

These are just a few of the ways that you "bear fruit for God."

Do you know what the alternative is? Paul states it clearly in v. 5. If you choose instead to make use of your life and body and mind and will to give expression to sinful passions and deeds, you will "bear fruit for death" (Rom. 7:5b). ***Everybody bears fruit for someone or something: either for God or for death.*** Either you devote your life to bearing fruit for God and thus preparing for yourself an eternity of joy and unimaginable bliss with him forever, or you devote yourself to bearing fruit for death. What will it be?

Paul's concern in this passage is to explain to us how it is possible for our lives to matter to and for God. He explains how it is possible for us to "bear fruit for God" rather than for death.

Set Free from the Law and Enslaved to Christ (vv. 1-6)

Paul is still unpacking for us the significance of his statement back in vv. 14-15 that "we are not under law but under grace." We looked closely at this and determined that he is speaking of one's relationship to the law in two senses.

First, for the man or woman who has died with Christ and been raised to walk in newness of life, the law is not the primary driving force or controlling principle in one's relationship with God. That does not mean we have no spiritual and moral laws to obey. We are without question "under the law of Christ" (1 Cor. 9:19-23). But we do not obey law in any form as a way of putting God in our debt or in an attempt to gain favor from him or as a way to pay him back for what he has done for us.

Second, Paul also has in view the Law of Moses in particular. We are not living under the terms and dictates of the old covenant. We live under the terms and dictates of the new covenant. And we saw last week that the primary difference between the two covenants isn't that one is characterized by law and the other by grace. There is law in both covenants. But in the old covenant, the demands of the law did not promise or provide the power to obey. In the new covenant, together with the commandments of Christ is promised the power of the Holy Spirit to enable us to obey.

Perhaps it would be helpful for us to think of three ways in which people relate to or respond to law.

There is first of all, the **legalist**. The legalist is the person who lives in bondage to the law. He imagines that his acceptance with God, as well as that of others, is dependent on obedience. His motivation for obeying the law is fear, lest by failing he forfeits his standing with God. And he is quick to impose on others his view of the law as a condition for their approval and their acceptance with God.

There is secondly, the **antinomian**. If the legalist lives “under” the law the antinomian stands “against” the law. He rejects the law altogether. Obedience to divine commands has no place in his spiritual life and he insists that to focus on the law of God is to undermine the grace of God. Law and grace are to his way of thinking utterly antithetical. You must choose one or the other.

Finally, there is the **biblical** perspective on one’s attitude to law. This person is attuned to what Scripture says and acknowledges that whereas the law cannot save us, it is still good and holy. The problem, then, isn’t with the law. The problem is with us. The law isn’t deficient. We are. So the biblical Christian delights in God’s law as an expression of his will for us and thus seeks to obey it by the power of God’s grace and the indwelling Holy Spirit.

In sum, “the legalist fears the law and is in bondage to it; the antinomian hates the law and repudiates it; the law-abiding believer loves the law and obeys it” by the power that God himself provides (Stott, 60).

A Biblical Response to the Legalist (vv. 1-6)

Here in Romans 7:1-6 Paul draws a comparison between a married couple and the Christian’s relationship to the law. Please don’t misunderstand Paul’s intent. People have drawn unwarranted conclusions about the issue of marriage, divorce, and remarriage based on this passage. This is not Paul’s entire perspective on that subject. You have to read 1 Corinthians 7 to see what he believes.

Here in Romans 7 Paul is simply using marriage to illustrate our relationship to law. His point is that when someone’s spouse dies the person is free from any further marital obligations. Paul isn’t talking about whether or not there are legitimate grounds for divorce and remarriage. His point is simply this: death puts an end to the relationship. Death frees one to enter into a new and binding relationship.

He says that a woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. If while they are still married, she marries another, she is guilty of adultery. However, if her husband dies, the marriage is dissolved and she is free to marry another man. The point is simply that the death of the husband releases the woman from the bond of that marriage.

Paul then proceeds to make application of this general principle. ***Just as physical death terminates a marriage, so spiritual death terminates our bondage to the law.*** When Jesus died for us under the condemnation of the law, God reckoned us to have died. We are no longer in bondage to the law as far as its condemning power is concerned. Since we died in and with Christ when he died, we are set free from

the law and can now enter into a new relationship with him. ***We no longer belong to the law but to Christ, just as the widow no longer is married to her deceased spouse and is free to marry another.***

The point of the analogy is that ***becoming a Christian involves a complete change of relationship and allegiance.*** Our identification in and with Jesus in his death, burial, and resurrection is “so that you may belong to another” (v. 4), namely, to Jesus. And this is in order that you “may bear fruit for God.” We are now enabled to live a life that honors God because “we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code” (v. 6).

Don't misunderstand what Paul is saying. He isn't saying that when you died with Christ and were set free from the law that you were released to wander through life without guidance or being governed by anyone or anything. No. You were freed from the law precisely so that you might be joined to Christ, to live for him. This is yet another way of describing what we saw earlier in chapter six: we are joined spiritually with Jesus; we are united in covenant solidarity with him; we are, in a sense, married to our Bridegroom, and our loyalty and love are altogether bound up with him.

So, if you ask the question: “Is the law in Scripture still binding on the believer?” The answer is both Yes and No. No, we are free from the law in the sense that obedience to it is not the basis for our acceptance with God and we need not fear its condemning power. Jesus came not simply to die for our sins but also to live for our righteousness. He obeyed the law perfectly in our place, and his righteousness is then credited or accounted to us when we put our faith in him. The law is no longer our lord. Jesus is.

But there is also a sense in which we still sustain a relationship to the law. It is God's loving guide to how we should live. It is the moral compass that directs our daily steps. But the motivation of our obedience to the law has radically changed. “Why do we serve? Not because the law is our Master and we have to, but because Christ is our husband and we want to. Not because obedience leads to salvation, but because salvation leads to obedience . . . The law says, do this and you will live. The gospel says, you live, so do this” (Stott, 65-66).

As we saw last week, we are still slaves of a sort. But the lord and master we serve isn't the law but Christ. And the power by which we serve and obey isn't found in the law itself but in “the new way of the Spirit” (v. 6) and the energy that he provides us. We don't find strength to obey in the external code of law itself but in the indwelling presence and power of the Spirit of God.

The law may clearly tell us what to do, but it does nothing to provide the enabling strength to do it. That is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit renews and shapes and transforms us within so that we think differently and respond to God's will with new affections and new desires. Again, drawing on Paul's analogy in vv. 1-6, there is a sense in which ***every Christian has gone through the termination of a marriage. Your former spouse has died. You are now free to marry another: Jesus Christ. You no longer belong to that former spouse, the law. You now belong to Jesus.***

And the purpose of this death of the first marriage and our being joined to a new husband, Jesus, is not so that we might ignore God's written rules and live in sin, but so that we might bear fruit for God!

But Paul knew that not everyone would fully comprehend what he was saying. He knew that some would take his comments about our being set free from the law and conclude that the law itself is evil and that

we are now free to live however we please. The result of this reaction to Paul's words is antinomianism. Paul's response to it is found in vv. 7-13.

A Biblical Response to the Antinomian (vv. 7-13)

It would appear that two charges were brought against the law. First, based on their misunderstanding of what Paul has just said, they concluded that the law is *sinful*. Second, they thought that the law is *lethal*.

So, does what Paul just said in vv. 1-6 mean that the law of God is sinful? By no means! Heck no! God forbid! Paul then proceeds to describe two functions of the law that prove it is not sinful.

First, the law serves to reveal our sins (v. 7). Were it not for the law shining a light on his sin, he would have continued and persisted in his wickedness without giving it much of a second thought. He would never have repented had not the law brought conviction to his heart.

Paul appeals to the last of the Ten Commandments which says, "You shall not covet." Why this commandment? Probably because it uncovers the desires and intentions of the heart, rather than simply focusing on external behavior. Covetousness was always there, but Paul didn't feel the force of how evil it is until he heard God say, "You shall not covet." It was then, after the law alerted him to how covetousness betrays a failure to trust God with what we have and to be content with what he has provided, that he felt the sting of how badly he had failed. Longing to possess what others have was imperceptibly present in Paul's heart. But the wickedness of it, the idolatry that gives rise to it, was not fully felt until he heard from God's law that it was prohibited.

We all enter this world thinking that we deserve to possess whatever we want, especially when others possess it and we don't. Our desires are the only law we recognize. But when God's law pronounces this sort of covetousness as sin and as deserving of punishment, we are awakened to its presence in our hearts and the destructiveness of it.

That is why the law is not the answer to our problems. The law only serves to alert us to the existence of our problems. It is Christ and his grace and love and power that provide an answer to our sin. Don't blame the law when your sin is exposed. As Paul says in v. 8, it was *sin* that seized "an opportunity through the commandment" that I should not covet. And it was *sin* that "produced in me all kinds of covetousness" (v. 8). ***Sin is to blame, not the law.*** The law may have pushed a button in our souls that alerted us to sin. But the law is not to blame for how we respond. Sin is.

Think about how this works. Back in the summer of 1970 I drove with two friends to Lake Tahoe. While we were in Nevada, we drove well over 100 mph. Why? Because there was no law against it. There were no speed limits. We never gave a second thought to our speed. We never considered the fact that by driving this fast we were putting our lives in danger and the lives of everyone else on the highway. But once we emerged from the desert and entered the city, the speed limit was clearly posted. We suddenly came to grips with the fact that to drive faster than 70 was against the law. What was our response? We defiantly continued to drive at 100! We never considered the implications of our speed until we saw a sign that put limitations on it.

What happens when you see a sign on a door that says, “Private: Do Not Enter!” If the sign were not there you would likely pass by without giving it a second thought. But the law against entrance almost immediately awakens in you an obsession with knowing what’s on the other side of the door. You are suddenly faced with the pressing temptation to ignore the sign and to go in. Sin sees a law and goes berserk.

Why does the law have this effect on us? It isn’t because the law is evil or sinful. It is because *we are!* Forbidden fruit always tastes sweeter. We are by nature defiant to authority. We interpret limits placed on our freedom as unjust and oppressive.

So here Paul says, “Before I came to know God’s law, my conscience was at ease. I was complacent, even self-righteous about the state of my soul, thinking myself to be very much alive and well. But when my life was suddenly exposed to the searchlight of God’s perfect law, I died. That is to say, my sense of peace and self-assured tranquility was destroyed. That sense of, ‘It is well with my soul,’ came to an abrupt end, as my sinful flesh reared up within me in defiance of God’s revealed will.”

But again, Paul is careful to point out that the law itself is not to blame for this outcome. I am to blame. My sin is to blame. Sin took what God intended for good and distorted and exploited it for evil purposes.

The commandment that said if I obey it, I get life, turned out to be the instrument of death. Why? Because the commandment is evil? No. Because I was deceived into thinking I could obey it and earn eternal life. The law is like a broom that is brought into a room that seems to be clean. It appears that all is well, until the broom sweeps and the dust flies. So also, the law, when it penetrates our hearts, sin flies up and chokes us. The law is like a straw that stirs a glass of what appears to be clean water, only to discover that the dark liquid that had settled at the bottom suddenly rises up and tinctures the entire glass.

One of the reasons why Paul takes time to vindicate and defend the law is because some of his readers would have been shocked by his language. After all, do you remember Psalm 119?

“In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches. I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word” (Ps. 119:14-16).

“Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day” (Ps. 119:97).

“his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night” (Ps. 1:2).

Paul completely agrees with this. Look at v. 12 where he declares that “the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.” It is my sin that killed me, not the law. Sin used the commandments of God as its weapon. So the reason we must die to the law isn’t because the law is wicked. It is because we are. As he says again in v. 13, the laws and commandments of God are good, but they expose my sinful heart and arouse in me all manner of wicked, self-serving defiance.

Conclusion

What, then, is the solution to the problem that the law poses to us? The solution is the gospel! Keep ever in the forefront of your mind that because of your death, burial, and resurrection with Jesus, you died to the law. It cannot save you. Only Jesus can. And since you died to the law and are now joined to Christ, you are alive to God. You can now, by God’s power and grace, “bear fruit” for him!