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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Third Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 8A)

June 29, 2014

Text: Romans 7:1–13

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Dear saints of God, if you say your daily prayers – morning, noon, and evening, read your Bible at home faithfully and regularly, attend church worship services with a sincere heart and fervent devotion – which includes tithing on your gross income, adopt the discipline of regular fasting and charitable giving above your congregational tithes and offerings, you will be walking in the statutes of the Lord. In order to ensure that you live according to godly principles and biblical insights, you will also need to listen only to Christian music, either classical or contemporary, buy books and magazines written by Christian authors discussing Christian topics. And if you must read fiction, Christian fiction is preferable to profane writings. Most movies should be rated PG or G, PG-13 movies are definitely to be a rare occasion, R rated or worse is simply out of the question. Associate, as much as humanly possible, with Christians. Your closest, most intimate friends should be Missouri-Synod Lutherans.

And if you truly want to live the victorious Christian life, attend an annual conference dedicated to pursuing deeper forms of Christian spirituality. Possible conference topics might include principles for Christian finances, parenting, evangelism, intercessory prayer, spiritual warfare, identifying and enhancing your spiritual gifts, engaging in the culture wars; or maybe a conference dedicated to studying theology, church history, or how to interpret the Bible rightly with solid Biblical hermeneutics. Learning Biblical Greek and Hebrews would aid this godly endeavor immensely. And while you're at it, you might schedule in a Christian marriage retreat for you and your beloved spouse; and do so without the kids so you can devote complete attention to each other. Don't forget about summer youth camps so that your kids can live a vigorous, powerful Christian life of faith and devotion.

And you should begin making plans to participate in a short term mission trip in a foreign country. These can vary in length from a couple of weeks to several months. There's nothing like missionary work to stimulate Christian growth and maturity.

These are the kinds of things you should be doing, dear saints, if you want to live a victorious Christian life which rises above the sins and temptations of the world and the devil.

Romans 7 shouts out a thunderous, “Not so fast” to all the nonsense I’ve been saying over the past few minutes. And trust me when I say, that everything I said is encouraged in various churches and denominations in our country. Now don’t get me wrong, most of these things, events, and disciplines are ok as far as they go. But the idea that we can somehow live above the ravaging effects of sin in our daily Christian lives if we’ll only pursue Biblical principles of living is, at best, utter and complete nonsense, at worst, damnable heresy that jeopardizes one’s salvation.

This week and next we will work through Romans 7, one of the most challenging and important passages in the New Testament. This chapter describes how Christians have a right standing before God. There are only two options: through the good works of the Law (as described in the first part of my sermon) or through the gracious gift of Christ’s Gospel (as described in the NT). Only one can be true; they are mutually exclusive when it comes to how Christians appear before God justified and righteous in His sight.

Paul begins, in vs. 1–3, by using an analogy rooted in marriage law. A married woman is bound to her husband as long as he’s alive. If a married woman leaves her husband, moves in with another man, she is guilty of adultery. That’s one of the basic, foundational laws of marriage. But, if the husband dies, she’s free to marry whomever she wishes. In other words, the law applies until death, hence the phrase in the marriage liturgy, “until death us do part.” So far so good, pretty simple stuff.

Vs. 4 is where the clincher comes in, “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.” We died in Christ in baptism. That’s what Romans 6 was all about. Don’t you know, says Paul, that as many of you as were baptized into Christ’s death were also baptized into His resurrection life. Our baptism was a death leading to a new life.

That’s where the glorious connection is made in today’s text. We died to the Law with all of its requirements, restrictions, and punishments. When it comes to the Law’s relationship to us, it’s a widower. It used to be married to us but that binding marriage covenant came to an end when we died in Christ through baptism. We now belong to

another, to the one who was raised from the dead!. Dear saints of God, the Biblical Law can no longer make any legitimate claims of mastery over you for you died and are risen again into a new relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's eternally good news for us. Our right standing before God is established not in the Law of good works, our victorious Christian living, but in the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him, we are set free from bondage and guilt and shame and fear and eternal death because our sins, past, present, and future, are forgiven in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The result of our new union with Christ in baptism is "in order that we may bear fruit for God" (vs. 4). Our union with Christ is not a fruitless relationship. Jesus is the vine, we are the branches that bears fruit in His righteousness. In Galatians 5:22–23, Paul calls this the fruit of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."

Before dying in Christ, "we were living in the flesh" and our "sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death" (vs. 5). That's what life was like when we were under the lordship of the Law, before we heard the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins and new life!

This is utterly astounding. Hear me well, dear saints. Living under the God's holy Law arouses, incites, and increases our sinful passions. Paul isn't only talking about corrupted sexual passions but any and every sinful desire. Look over at the middle of vs. 7, "Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have know what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.'" As soon as the Law says you shouldn't desire something, your sinful nature immediately wants it. Or the opposite is true. God's Law says you should desire something, your sinful nature says no thanks. So declares Paul in vs. 8 & 11, "But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness...<sup>11</sup>For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me." Sin uses the Law to bring about death and judgment.

According to God's Word, you live under God's Lordship in one of two ways: under the rule of God's Law or under the grace of God's Gospel. Life under the Law incites and arouses sin so that we yield our bodily members to sin and wickedness. Conversely, life under God's Gospel yields our members as instruments of righteousness through the resurrection life of Jesus given to us in Baptism.

Please don't misunderstand me or the apostle Paul's teaching in Romans 7. God's Law is not sinful, see vs. 7. Rather the "law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good" (vs. 12). The root problem is sin which has so thoroughly corrupted our human nature. Vs. 13, "Did that which is good (i.e., God's Law), then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good (i.e., God's Law) in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure."

People of God, I cannot speak with a greater sense of urgency in what I'm about to say. There are so many voices out there in the larger Christian community that are telling Christians that they can live above sin, that their lives can rise above temptation if – and it's a big, humongous if – they would but live according to firm, Biblical principles and techniques. It's a dangerous lie, a well-intentioned lie, but deadly nonetheless. All those things that I mentioned at the beginning of this sermon are good. But if they are pursued under the lordship of the Law – do this and don't do that – and with the hope that our sincere efforts will achieve the desired victory, they will produce death, ruination, and shame.

The righteous life you desire to live does not come under the Law but under the grace of the Lord Jesus. Please return back to vs. 4, "you have died to the law through the body of Christ (ie., baptism and the Gospel in ch. 6), so that (notice the result) you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that (notice the result) we may bear fruit for God." True righteousness comes through Jesus.

The Gospel is God's power unto salvation for all who believe (Rom. 1:16). And the Gospel is this: through faith in Christ alone and by His grace alone your sins are not only forgiven but you are declared righteous before God the Father and made a living temple of the Holy Spirit because of the Lord Jesus Christ alone. You belong to another, the Lord Jesus Christ. And through Him you are alive and righteous and whole and complete and holy and righteous and well-pleasing to God. That's who you are in the Gospel of Jesus !!

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.