

LEADER GUIDE:**"A DESTRUCTIVE MARRIAGE" – Romans 7:1-6**

Main Point: *You can freely serve God when you belong to Christ and not the Law.*

SERIES OVERVIEW: Romans is required reading for every disciple of Jesus Christ. In this letter we learn what the gospel is, why we need it, how Jesus is at the center of it and how we become right with God by clinging to Christ (Romans 1-4). In Romans 5-8 we learn what knowing Christ means on a daily basis. God's grace sets us free from guilt and imparts joy for serving. We'll discover a divine perspective of suffering and develop confidence in God's plan, presence and peace.

PASSAGE BACKGROUND: In the previous chapters, Paul tells us how to be right with God by faith in Christ, and this by grace alone. In chapters 5-8, Paul shows how this grace of God gives us assurance even in suffering.

[NOTE: Please refer to the Sermon Insert Questions from the service program or go online to see the original connecting, understanding, and living questions]

CONNECTING:

Allow your people plenty of time to share. You can learn a lot about your people's personalities, level of faith, and understanding of Scripture by how they answer these connecting questions. Use these connecting questions to understand and diagnose the condition of your flock rather than to teach. Listen more than lead in this section.

QUESTION #1: What are some personal and social expectations (laws/rules/norms, etc.) that are common in American society? What happens to people internally and externally, in their relationships, when they fail to meet those expectations?

- Some examples to get you started:
- Be an extrovert; be patriotic; be efficient and super productive
- People ostracize you; could lose your job; etc.

QUESTION #2: Death is a pretty hard reality to dwell on, let alone see any good in, but can you think of any situations when the death of someone has been a relative good thing? Think of examples from history or books and movies in pop culture. When has death helped set people free in some way?

- Some examples to get you started:
- Obviously, Jesus Christ
- Any martyrs and their impact on others to change the world

UNDERSTANDING:

QUESTION #1: Why does Paul use the analogy of marriage in Romans 7? How does it help advance his point? Where does the analogy break down?

- Most of Paul's audience would have instantly understood the predicament of a woman in marriage under the Old Testament Law. She was stuck with her spouse, no matter how awful he might be. And the only way out, was for him to die. So in this way, Paul wanted to show the terrible tyranny of the Law as well as the necessity of death to be rescued from it.
- Additionally, Paul wanted to explain the gospel in relational terms...which is exactly what it is at the core. He wants us to belong to Christ (v. 4)...to be married to Him (Eph. 5:25, 32). The only way we can be married to Christ is to get out of our first marriage to the Law. And the only way we can do that is to die.
- This analogy advances His point well from a "transfer of ownership" (i.e., slavery) perspective, that he began talking about in chapter 6. As spouses, we will either be under the condemning headship of the Law as husband or under the loving headship of Christ as husband.
- The analogy does break down. Where the woman is freed by the death of the husband to marry another, a Christian is the one who must die and rise again to be married to Christ, who also dies and rises again.

QUESTION #2: What are some good things about God's law? Are there good things about Man's law? Why do you think God wanted us to have His Law?

- It shows us:
 - God's perfect character
 - God's perfect design for order in the universe for the good of all Creation
 - God's perfect expectations for us so we maintain that order
 - God's perfect consequences when we fail so disobedience and disorder are deterred
 - God's perfect justice so we have hope that all will be made right one day
- Insofar that the law of human beings reflect some of these perfections that God intended, human law is good. For example, the speed limit shows the character of God who is good to desire order on the roads so people can avoid tragic accidents. And the speed limit's consequences are relatively fair and effective to deter further disobedience and disorder. However, abortion law is not good. It does not reflect God's character as One who values life and protects the weak. It does not bring about good for all. It does not give proper expectations and consequences to deter further evil. It does not display justice for the weak and oppressed so that people are drawn towards hope for a future that is perfectly just.
- God wanted us to have His Law to teach us about His perfect standard *AND* that we cannot attain it and therefore need His grace through Christ to be saved. Israel was a "test case" to prove these things. They received the perfect Law directly from God, Himself. Yet, they continually failed to keep it. This true and repetitively discouraging story of Israel's disobedience points all of us to our need for Jesus Christ and His gospel.

QUESTION #3: How does the perfect Law of God bring more sin out of us, leading to judgment and death? How can a Christian view the Law in a positive light, even after they have “died to it.”? (See the promise of Jeremiah 31:31-34).

- The Law provokes us to sin. Because it constantly stands over us as a judge and reminds us that we need to obey and that we fail to obey, it is used by the lies of sin to tempt our flesh to rebel against it. Again, the marriage analogy can be helpful. A nagging spouse, even if telling us to do a good thing, can make us want to leave the marriage and ultimately fail to do that good thing because we can't take the constant guilt-tripping (e.g., Prov. 21:19)! Additionally, the Law not only nags us but tells us it is going to punish our failure with death. Who wouldn't want to rebel against an oppressive authority like that?
- But when we die to the oppressive demands of the Law by trusting in Christ and letting Him obey the Law for us, we do not see the Law as a weight around our necks. Instead, it becomes a positive thing that points to the character of the God we have come to love because He first loved us so much that He sent His Son to die for us (John 3:16; 1 John 4:19). Our hearts become so filled up with His love that we welcome Him “writing the His Law on our hearts” (Jeremiah 31:31-34). This means the Law is not a judge for us anymore but instead, an opportunity for us to begin to show God how much we love Him. We become “obedient from the heart” (Rom. 6:17) in that our obedience is not slavish or duty-driven, but comes out naturally from a heart that has been changed by the deep, deep love of Jesus.

LIVING:

Spend some time discussing these questions. Let your people freely digest what God's Word is telling them. Make sure to write down important things that are communicated so you can pray for your flock and help them take next steps in their new commitments.

QUESTION #1: This week you, and I, will sin in some way. We will break God's Law. How would you handle this disobedience if you were an unbeliever married to law and expectations? How would you handle this as a believer who is still trying to “cohabitate” with the Law? How would you handle this sin as a believer who is fully dead to the Law and filled up with the love of Christ?

- Unbeliever:
 - 1.) Denial; or
 - 2.) Despair (because you expected better out of yourself, not because you care what God thinks);
or
 - 3.) Self-justification: making excuses for why you did what you did; or
 - 4.) Blameshifting: excusing your failure because of the actions of others; or
 - 5.) Protesting: declaring that the Law should be changed to better accommodate your actions
- Believer still running back to their relationship to the Law:
 - 1.) Despair (because you expected better out of yourself *because* you care what God thinks)
 - 2.) Extreme repentance: repeatedly seeking God's forgiveness and never feeling forgiven
 - 3.) Shame and Guilt: interactions with God and others is overshadowed by a brooding demeanor; joy is conspicuously absent

- 4.) Excessive Serving: ramping up the intensity of your service to God and others as a way to compensate for your feelings of failure
- Believer, fully dead to the Law and alive in Christ:
 - Repentance that does not linger into extreme, repetitive repentance (see above)
 - A deep sense of joy from knowing you are loved and accepted even in your failure and sin
 - A desire to serve others in the name of God: specifically in showing them how to experience freedom in the love and grace of Christ

QUESTION #2: What does it look like to serve God and others in the new way of the Spirit versus the old way of the written code? (i.e., what's the difference between the "spirit of the law" and the "letter of the law.")

- New way: feeling so overjoyed that God loves you, regardless of your failure and sin, that you consider it a delight to help others and serve them in the name and for the glory of God
- Old way: feeling coerced into serving others for God because you believe God will hammer you with the consequences laid out in His Law for failing to serve Him and others.

GOSPEL OPPORTUNITY:

At this time ask your group to privately reflect if there is anyone who feels like they have never repented and received Christ's forgiveness. Then, share the gospel: 1.) God is our authority (Gen. 1; Rom. 1:18-23) 2.) Each of us have rebelled and sinned against His authority; (Rom. 3:23) 3.) Because of this rebellious sin we are under the penalty of His condemnation and wrath; (Rom. 6:23) 4.) Jesus came to die and rise again to wash away our sins and bear the wrath of God in our place (Rom. 5:6-11) 5.) All we have to do is receive this free gift of grace and eternal life by trusting in Christ alone for our salvation (Rom. 6:23 & 10:9-11). Allow people to share right there with the group that they desire to be saved and then pray over them and have them pray to receive Christ as Savior. Have group members gather around and lay hands on them. Or offer to talk with anyone after group about these things if no one is comfortable to open up in front of the group. Please let me know what happens!! How exciting!!

REVIEW: What were last week's assignments?

Our "members" (6:13, 19) refers to our strengths, abilities, gifts and resources. On a practical level, how can we offer these things to God as individuals and as a Church? Review your list of ideas from last week and add a few new ones. Choose two or three to put into practice this week. For next weekend (2/25-26) read Romans 7:1-6. Why does Paul use the illustration of marriage in his teaching?

REFLECTION: Discuss last week's assignments

Share your list of ideas and how you put them into practice last week.

NEW Follow Up Assignments:

As a believer, intentionally focus on these first 6 verses in Romans 7 when you struggle with a sin this week. Think of the two ways to handle your failure: as a spouse beloved by Christ or as a spouse condemned by the Law. Choose how you will respond and share the outcome with your friends in LIFE Group.

NEXT STEPS:

1. **Question: Have you invited someone new to your group lately?** If not, don't miss the opportunity God gives us over the Christmas and New Years season to meet many new visitors to Stonebridge. Invite them to your LIFE Group!
2. Make sure your roster and attendance are up to date in InFellowship!
3. Have you considered having Brett from Safe Families come to give a presentation at your group yet?
4. Have you served as a group at one of our partner ministries in Cedar Rapids this year?