



## “Married to Christ”<sup>1</sup> Romans 7:1-6

Last year, I had a friend of mine who was pastoring in New York send me a text and say, “Hey, would you like a free trip to Ft. Lauderdale for a few days to spend with me at a conference?” I could hardly believe the offer, but I soon accepted the offer. It was taking place the first week of January. Who wouldn’t want to get away from Holland at that time? So, I flew to Ft. Lauderdale for the conference, and that day I got news that the NYC airports were shut-down. My friend couldn’t make it to the conference and so I was alone at a conference for two days. The conference wasn’t bad. But, even Ft. Lauderdale was experiencing colder than normal temperatures, so it wasn’t comfortable being at the beach. Honestly, without my friend, I was thinking, “Why am I even here?!” Without my friend, I was just going to the conference, experiencing the schedule and then going to my room at night. The experience was in some ways “legalistic.” I was there, but my heart wasn’t in it.

You know, friendship can change your experiences, right? Sometimes, when you’re all alone, it’s nice. But other times, you need relationships to enhance the experience otherwise, you’re just going through the motions. This idea of relationship is what Paul seems to highlight even more in the text we’re going to study today in Romans 7. The text today actually connects with the previous text in chapter 6. These verses in chapter 7 relate to Paul’s question in 6:15: **<sup>15</sup> What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!** <sup>2</sup>

This question isn’t identical to verse 1 of chapter 6, where Paul asks if we should continue in sin so that grace can super-abound. The question here is essentially, **“Is sin tolerable in the Christian life because we’re not under law but under grace?”** We know that sin shouldn’t be celebrated, but maybe grace simply allows us to have a laissez faire attitude with our sins. Or, to put it another way, if we’re justified by grace, then our sins can be justifiable, too.

To this, Paul says “By no means!” Absolutely not! And, Paul gives two illustrations to help us understand why sin isn’t tolerable in a Christian’s life. First, illustration was a slave illustration, and Paul reveals that your master determines your actions and destiny. If you’re a slave to sin, it leads to greater sin and then death. But if you’re a slave to God, you will grow in righteousness and will enter into eternal life. Your Master determines your actions and destiny.

So, how can sin be tolerable if God doesn’t tolerate sin in his “slaves”? He has set us free from enslavement from sin, and he’s committed us to the gospel-mold. Now, in chapter 7, Paul gives a second illustration. And, this illustration helps us to understand even more how a relationship with the Lord affects our behavior. For those who don’t care as much for the “slavery” illustration, Paul emphasizes that our relationship with the Lord is so much more. We’re not merely slaves. The illustration of “slave”

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<sup>1</sup> This manuscript is still in the rough draft phrase. I recommend you utilize these notes in conjunction to the sermon to gain greater insight and clarity.

<sup>2</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ro 6:15.

had a point, but it cannot speak to the *beauty* of the relationship with the Lord. There really is only one great illustration for this, and that's the illustration of marriage.

So, turn in your Bibles to Romans 7, and let's read verses 1-6 together this morning. Before we do, let me pray for us today (pray for Central Avenue CRC):

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*7 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? <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup>*

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Paul's main idea here in these verses is: **Death changes your relationships!** And Paul argues this way in order to show how we are free to obey! As you get into Paul's argument, you might be thinking, "What in the world are you saying, Paul?! What do you mean?" Let me just say that Paul sometimes (or maybe oftentimes) uses what's called deductive reasoning. Meaning, he's state the fact, and then explains the fact. He did that with the slavery illustration. And, he does it here with a marriage and death illustration. If you're dead to the Law and married to Christ, you're free to obey the Lord. But how is that the case, Paul? Then he goes back and shows you his argument for how this is true.

So, not only does Paul emphasize that a Christian's identity is that they are *slaves to righteousness*, but that Christians are the bride of Christ. So, not only does sin not control us, but Christ's love constrains and empowers us.

So, *how* does marriage to Christ affect heart-felt obedience? Paul first says that

### **1. Death changes your relationship to the Law (vv. 1-3).**

Read verse 1 again with me: **7** 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?<sup>4</sup>

Again, when Paul says something like "do you not know," he's stating, "You do know this." And here, that's made more explicit when he says "for I am speaking to those who know the law." There are a couple things to note in this phrase. First, in Paul's talking about the Law, he's not using that phrase

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<sup>3</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ro 7:1–6.

<sup>4</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ro 7:1.

generically as any command. He's talking specifically about the Mosaic Law. This has been the case throughout the book of Romans, and there's no reason to believe that Paul's changing the idea here.

Since this is the case, I first thought Paul was talking specifically to Jewish Christians because they would *know* the law. However, I don't think that's necessarily the case. Paul quotes quite a bit from the Old Testament in this letter to the Roman church, and so I think Paul is actually saying to the whole church (Jews and Gentiles) that they know the Mosaic Law. They've studied their Old Testament. They know what it says. They know it so well that they know the Old Testament laws regarding marriage.

So, whereas in the previous analogy, Paul uses an illustration that all would know because it was a common cultural practice, this illustration would be known because the people have read their Bibles. Paul starts first by talking about the Law itself. Paul makes a statement that is probably a "Duh" statement. Meaning, it's painfully clear that this is the case. But, when the Bible makes these statements, we shouldn't gloss over them. We should appreciate that God is taking the time to make things obvious for us!

The obvious statement is that the Law is only binding on a person as long as they live. The Law speaks to living people. If a person dies, people aren't held accountable to it any more. In the Old Testament, no sacrifices were made on behalf of the dead. There weren't punishments for dead people. At death, they face God's welcome or condemnation. So, the Law has no more say on us when we're dead. Make sense? Good.

Paul then gets more specific in verse 2; so, let's read that verse again: <sup>2</sup>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.<sup>5</sup> Side note: It's a verse like this that adds to my belief that the law of marriage only applies in this life because Paul states that when the husband dies, the wife is released from the law of marriage. This law only applies as long as the man and the woman are alive. And, by the way, I know this might sound sad to you that you are not married to your spouse in Heaven, but the Scriptures also teach us that our relationships in Heaven will be fuller and more grand than they ever were on Earth. I believe we can trust God that his ways are best and glorious in this.

Paul's bigger point in stating this is to emphasize the illustration of marriage and how it relates to our need to obey. So, he says that if you're alive, then the law applies to you and is binding. Now, I need to make a clarification to something I said last week that was incorrect. I said last week that Paul doesn't state that the Law is a Master, but instead that sin is. However, in this illustration, I believe Paul clearly states that the Law is a Master. Just like in chapter 6, Paul says that righteousness and God are masters; so here, sin and the Law work together as our master. The reason I say this is because Paul uses a word like "bound," and you could translate verse 1 as "the law rules over a person as long as he lives."

The reason this is important to understand is that Paul is going to move forward with showing how sin hijacks and works alongside of the Law to not only condemn but to enhance our drive for sin. This doesn't mean that the Law is bad, but without a change of heart, the Law does not rescue us – it highlights our sinfulness.

So, going back to verse 2, Paul says that the woman is bound by the Law to her husband. But if her husband dies, she's released from the law of marriage. The term "released" in the ancient world meant

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<sup>5</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ro 7:2.

that she's under no obligation to any of the rules with marriage. She is *not married* any longer, and also, the term "released" indicated that she was also *free* to marry someone else if she so chose. Make sense? I know this might seem basic, but again, be thankful for these basic building blocks God is giving us.

Now, look at verse 3 with me: <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>

What if the husband isn't dead and the woman lives with another man? Paul says she'll be called an adulteress. Why? Because she's bound to her husband. Real quick, because we live in a culture that diminishes marriage, I must say that God created marriage as a covenant relationship. Marriage is spiritual and physical in its nature and affects the entirety of the persons involved. It was interesting to me when I heard a secular sociologist do a study on marriage and she discovered that there is something to marriage and commitment. She found, through her studies, that the marriage covenant actually does affect things. There's something different than simply living together. She's at least right on that point. We are created by the Lord and marriage was created by him as a marriage covenant. The breaking of that covenant damages the people. That's why one theologian named Dietrich Bonhoeffer, when performing a marriage ceremony, stated to the couple, **"It is not your love that sustains the marriage, but from now on, the marriage that sustains your love" (Bonhoeffer)**. We stay together because we covenanted together. And this covenant has rules for as long as we're alive. If you break the rules, the Law says you're an adulterer. However, what if the husband dies? And what if the woman marries another man? Is she an adulteress? No. The covenant of marriage isn't eternal. The covenant ended. She can marry another man and be committed to him.

But there's a little more that I think Paul is emphasizing with this illustration. The Law not only told us the rules, but the Law consistently condemned. You see how it would condemn a woman who stays with another man she's not married to. She's condemned as an adulteress. But upon her husband's death, the Law cannot condemn her.

This is the bigger point Paul has consistently emphasized in chapter 6. When Paul says that we are not under the Law, he's not been saying that the Law no longer applies in our lives – as though there's no standard for righteous living. What he's been emphasizing is that the Law cannot condemn us. We're free from the Law's condemnation. That's what's brought up in this illustration, too. The Law can't say to the woman, "Hey, you're married to another man! You're an adulteress." With the husband's death, the Law's condemning teeth have been knocked out of its mouth. She's free to marry.

So, here in verses 1-3, I think we see Paul's illustration and understand why I've marked this first point as "Death changes your relationship to the Law." If there's death, the Law can't condemn anymore. Now, Paul applies this illustration more specifically. But again, he's going to slowly state the obvious. And, I'm actually going to jump around in verses 4-6 now to help make sense of them. I want to jump to verse 5, and there we hear Paul saying that:

## 2. Death changes your relationship to the Law's consequences (v. 5).

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<sup>6</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ro 7:3.

Read verse 5 with me: <sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup>

Paul starts off verse 5 with “For,” and that means he’s trying to explain something to build off of his point. And then he says “while we were living in the flesh.” When you read that statement, you might take a moment to look at yourself and think, “Um, did my flesh come off?” Or, “Am I dead?” What does Paul mean when he says “While we were living in the flesh?” This is extremely important to understand, even as we move forward in Romans 7 and 8. I believe Paul uses the term “flesh” in this context to refer to all that is contrary to God’s glory. Or, I could say “the fallenness of sinfulness” in us. Now here, Paul says “While we were living in the flesh.” In other words, because we are slaves to righteousness, and because Paul has already talked about the fact that we have died with Christ when Jesus died on the cross. We are no longer living in the realm of the flesh. That doesn’t define us. Christ defines us.

Oh Ventura, I hope this makes sense to you. A couple weeks ago, I was reading a story about a man who bought a dog. This dog was a wonderful family dog, but the only problem with the dog was that he loved to run. Whenever he went outside, he ran. Sometimes they’d have to go out searching for the dog because he wouldn’t come back. So, finally, the man and his wife sprang for an invisible fence. If you know anything about those fences, it’s an underground system that sends a signal to the dog’s collar, and if the dog gets too close to the boundaries of the yard, the dog gets a zap. This man said that after a while, he didn’t even have to have the fence on. The dog simply did not go near the boundaries, and that solved the issue of him running away.

Think about this as it relates to what Paul’s saying here with “living in the flesh.” When we were living in the flesh, we were under its bondage and rule. It told us where to go and where we could thrive. We were stuck. And, it shocked us into submission. But now we’re free from the bondage. We don’t live *in the flesh*. And yet, some Christians still think they can’t go past the lines. When temptations come our way, we quickly cower and then the Law condemns worse than a shock-collar. Paul is telling us here that we are no longer under that domain! Sin is not your master. Your flesh doesn’t own you. The Law cannot condemn! Do you believe this? Look at the glorious freedom Christ has given to you!

But, I’m getting ahead of myself. Before we focus on the freedom in Christ, think back to the bondage from which Christ has set you free. Paul says that our sinful passions were at work in us. So, putting the theology of Romans together, Paul has said that we are born sinners. Therefore, it makes sense we would have sinful passions. But those sinful passions aren’t neutral. They’re at work within “our members.” Our members are simply all the parts of us that comprise us. Our will, our emotions, our thoughts, our body. Everything about us has been affected by sin. This is what theologians have historically called *total depravity*. That phrase doesn’t mean that we are as wicked as possible in our actions, but that our whole selves have been infiltrated by sin. This is what Paul says here in verse 5. Our sinful passions are at work in our members.

But Paul presses this statement by adding how the Law works in a person’s life. He says that the sinful passions are aroused by the Law. Wait, what? This would be a challenging, shocking and maybe angering statement to a practicing Jew in the first century. They would think that the Law curbs sin. That, after all, is even the argument Paul is speaking on here. If the Law isn’t our master, and grace is instead, then we can tolerate sin in our lives, right?

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<sup>7</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ro 7:5.

But Paul counters that by saying that the Law does nothing to minimize sin. Instead, our sinful passions attach to the Law and then brings about all manners of greater sinfulness. Think about this practically in your own life. Have you ever had a situation where you didn't want something until you were told "no." I've had it before when I've chosen to remove certain food items from my diet. Or, if I've taken a day to fast. All of a sudden it seems, I'm now starving for those things! The "no" awakened within me a greater "yes" for that thing.

This is how our sinful passions work. When they're told "no," our sinfulness says "Oh yeah, I'm going to take it. So there!" And the reason our sinfulness works this way is because sin leads to death. Sin is on a trajectory. The end of verse 5 says that our sinful passions "were at work in our members to bear fruit for death."

So, does the Law keep you from sin? Does the Law diminish sin? Does the Law empower you in your fight against sin? No. Instead, when we were in the flesh, sin took the opportunity to rebel when the Law showed up. This wasn't simply the case with us, but think back to the nation of Israel. Did the Law save them? No. Instead, they rebelled more and more, leading to exile and punishment from the Lord.

What about you? I hope you are not still living in the flesh and bound to your sins. Are you stuck in the cycle of bondage to addiction? Bondage to whatever passions you have? Or, have you been set free from bondage and set free to live for and follow Jesus? If you're in bondage to sin, you will die. And, Paul is using the word "death" here to refer to condemnation. The Bible says that it is appointed for men once to die and after that the judgment. What will be said of you at the judgment? God says "Now is the time for salvation." Don't die in your sins! To die in your sins is condemnation.

For those of us who have turned from our sinfulness and turn to Jesus for rescue and peace with God, we do not have the fear of the Law's condemnation because we are not living in the realm of the flesh. This doesn't mean that we can't listen to the flesh or that the flesh doesn't dog us. But the flesh doesn't control us. How has this happened? Now, we can move into verses 4 and 6. We are set free from the Law's condemnation because:

### **3. Death changes your relationship to the Law and frees you with Christ (vv. 4, 6).**

<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup>

The word "Likewise" connects with the illustration of the law of marriage. Keep in mind that the illustration doesn't have a perfect correlation. In the illustration of marriage, we have the husband dying and so the wife is set free to marry another man. In verse 4, Paul says that we have died to the law so that we could belong to Christ.

The point Paul is emphasizing is the aspect of death and how death changes our relationship to the Law. Through the body of Christ, people who trust and follow Jesus have died to the law. This is the point Paul emphasized many times over in chapter 6. We are so united with Jesus that when he died, we died. Meaning, his death to sin and death actually brought us to die to the domain of the rule of sin and the Law. We are dead to the Law's condemnation and sin's control. Again, do you believe this, Christian? When you're tempted to give into sin and despair, preach the truth of who you are and your position.

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<sup>8</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ro 7:4.

Satan, demons or even your own flesh is deceiving you to try to cause you to believe you *have to* go back to the old ways. Christian, it's simply *not true*. Live your identity! You are dead to the Law. And, if you say, "But it feels so strong," then let me ask you this, "Did Jesus die on the cross?" If you say "yes," then Paul says, "Then you died, too!" Your feelings don't change that reality! You, Christian, are dead to the condemnation of the Law.

And now that you are dead to the Law, you are free to marry another. This is where Paul expands the illustration. It's not simply that your spouse died and you marry another spouse. You have entered a new realm. You have died to the realm and control of sin, death and the Law. But it's not only that you are dead. You are alive. You are free. And now, in this new realm, there's a new "law" so-to-speak. You are free to belong to another. You cannot be accused of being a sinner because you are united with the one who was raised from the dead.

Again, Paul is picking up on his illustrations in chapter 6. Jesus didn't only die. Jesus rose from the dead to conquer death and give growth in holiness and eternal life. Now, if you say, "But growth in obedience is so hard," let me ask you another question, "Did Jesus rise from the dead?" How impossible is resurrection from the dead? It is entirely impossible unless God works a miracle! And yet, he did. And, if Jesus rose from the dead, then those who trust Jesus have been given resurrection life, too. And Paul says that we therefore bear fruit not for death, but for God.

Oh, think about this more. Fruit to death means that our lives end up being eternally meaningless. There's no point ultimately. Because, what does it matter if you gain the whole world and lose your soul? What does it matter if you have a happy life rejecting God, but then you get condemnation because you used God's gifts for your own selfish purposes? In the end, life doesn't matter. You're life leads to death and your works are dead. But, if you have been rescued by Jesus, then you have fruit to God. Why doesn't Paul say "fruit for life?" Because God is Life! And we were created for God himself. Our greatest delight and pleasure and satisfaction is in the Eternal One! Therefore, our works for God matter for eternity.

Ventura, this gets back to the point that I was making in the beginning of the sermon. A relationship changes everything. Without a relationship, everything can be meaningless, but in a relationship, life is breathed into what we do. How much more with God. Having a relationship with God, through Jesus and what Jesus did in the cross and resurrection, takes us from death to eternal life. Because Jesus took the just punishment of our sins and because he rose from the dead, all of us who trust him are given Jesus' righteousness as a gift. And, we're give grace to grow in obedience until we see God face-to-face and are finally set completely free!

So, Paul says in verse 6 (look there with me): <sup>6</sup>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.<sup>9</sup> We are released from the Law. The Law cannot make demands on us. We're dead to it. It tries to condemn, but it has no say. Which, by the way, Ventura, should mean so much to us. It's like one of my favorite hymns that says, "When Satan tempts me to despair and tell me of the guilt within. . . ." The Law condemns, do you listen to it? I know, Satan uses the Law to condemn God's children day and night, but the Spirit is in us to remind us of Christ and point us upward to look at the One who made an end of all our sin! We are released from the Law's condemnation. There's no law binding us to it. So, we are dead to what once held us captive.

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<sup>9</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ro 7:6.

When sin comes knocking at your door, tapping on your shoulders, calling you; remind yourself, you have no obligation to answer. Instead, praise Jesus you're free.

But what does it mean to be free? Paul introduces the third person of the Godhead: the Spirit. He'll talk more of the Spirit in chapter 8, but for right now, look again at the end of verse 6: so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

In this marriage illustration, Paul emphasizes the relationship with Christ, the Father and the Spirit. Do you see this? We are free to God because we are married to Christ. And, in being married to Christ, we are empowered by the Holy Spirit. As a result, we're not just obeying rules. We have a relationship with the Lord. A relationship with God changes everything.

Now, how does this apply to the question in chapter 6 that basically asks, "Is sin tolerable in our lives because we're not under the law but under grace?" Paul says, "If you're secure in a relationship with God. If you're in covenant with the Lord, his love and grace will grow you." Look at this. The Holy Spirit is given to us to empower us to obey. By the way, this statement reveals that the Law isn't abolished completely. Instead, the Spirit is the fulfillment of the Jeremiah 31:33 that says, "**33 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.**"<sup>10</sup> The law is given not to condemn, but instead the law is in their hearts so that means there's a desire to honor and please the Lord. And the Spirit is given to apply and empower us to honor the Lord.

Christians, do you savor and rejoice in the fact that you are in relationship with God? Recently, I was trying to encourage one of my children by saying that the Lord loves them. Their response was, "Yeah, I know." And then I said something like, "God, who created all, who didn't have to love us, and can do whatever he wants. The all-powerful God who does all, loves *you!*" That love changes everything. No longer is living rote obedience. Instead, that love affects our actions.

When Paul asks the questions, "Is sin tolerable," Paul going to the marriage illustration is perfect because in marriage, we're bound in a covenant. I didn't stand at the altar with Tracy and say, "Do this. Don't do that. Don't do that. Do this. If you do this other thing, you're gonna pay." Instead, we vowed to love one another 'til death do us part. Yet, that didn't lead either Tracy or me to say, "Oh, I can commit adultery because we've given each other our commitment." Instead, we respect and love each other. That doesn't mean we're perfect and that we don't sin, but it does mean, we want to love more.

How much more with God. Oh think of our marriage with Christ. In Ephesians 5:25-27, Paul shows us what Jesus' commitment to us looks like: **Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, <sup>26</sup> that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, <sup>27</sup> so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.**<sup>11</sup>

Look how committed Jesus is to you, Christian! If Jesus is committed to you growing in holiness, will you grow in godliness? If Jesus hates sin and the Father has ordained to grow a hatred in you for sin, will you

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<sup>10</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Je 31:33.

<sup>11</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Eph 5:25-27.

hate sin? If God has promised that you will make it to his judgment in Christ's perfection, will you make it there?

**Is God gracious? Yes! Is there forgiveness in Christ? Absolutely. But does forgiveness mean we tolerate sin? No. It means we're in a loving relationship with the eternal God who is committed to us. Now, by the power of the Spirit, may we not simply obey out external conformity, but let's live out of the love he has given to us! He gave us death to the Law so that we could live in freedom and obedience in close relationship with him!**

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