

A Study in Romans

Study Seven Romans 7:7-8:8

Day One

7 What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet."

8 But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead.

9 Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died.

10 I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death.

v. 7 – As I mentioned in an earlier study, Law was the instrument that made me aware of what sin is and Law gave my sin expression, so to speak. Let me explain. Let's say that every day I take a shortcut to work by walking over some grass. It seems innocent enough. Then one day a sign goes up that says, "Keep Off the Grass." I come to find out that this has always been private property and I was doing something wrong without knowing it.

But now I have a problem, for this grassy shortcut saves me a lot of time every day. I have now been informed that it is wrong, but I decide to continue to do it. Now I am "sinning," but I did not know I was sinning until the sign went up.

Let's go one step further. Let's say I had a bad feeling every time I walked on the grass—my conscience bothered me. But the Law helped educate my conscience, which is not perfect or infallible, for I never really understood why I always felt bad when I walked on that grass. Now I really feel bad when I walk on that grass, but I still walk on it. Conscience can lead me to sense that I am doing something "wrong," but conscience may not be able to indicate what it is exactly. But now I choose to ignore my conscience and do what I know is wrong.

vs. 8&9 – Paul used the example of covetousness. Until the command came along, I could covet everything my neighbor had, including his spouse. Now the command has told me that is wrong, but it has no power to deal with the covetous desire that was there all along. All the Law did was define what that desire was and tell me it was against God's will.

v. 10 – There is nothing wrong with the commandments of the Law. They are not the problem. My sinful heart is the problem and yours was and is too. The Law, which is from God, is good and was to keep man from sin and death. Instead it gave rise to my sinful nature and since the wages of sin are death, led me to realize that I was separate from God and unable to do His will.

Day Two

11 For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death.

12 So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.

13 Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.

v. 11 – Paul referred to sin like it was a person with a will and personality. Here he wrote that sin seized the opportunity, deceived him and put him to death. It seems that sin has a power of its own that works in you and me. Could it be the sinful nature, the old man, that Paul referred to? I can worship God on Sunday and still criticize the worship leader’s selection of songs. It seems like there is an independent force, or another person, working in me. One is busy loving God and the other is criticizing my brother almost simultaneously. This is another reason why I must die and be raised with Christ. I need another power in my life; better yet, I need a fresh start with a new heart.

v. 12 – The problem is not the Law. I am the problem. My sinful nature is the problem. I am not as evil as I could be, but that doesn’t mean that I am not evil. A dead body may be in varying states of decay and decomposition, but it is dead nonetheless. And there may be people who give more wicked expressions to their evil than I do, but that doesn’t mean that I am more righteous than they are. I am evil and they are evil, until one of us calls out to God and He makes us righteous.

v. 13 – I have said many times: If God wants us to do His will, He must tell us what that will is. God revealed His will first through the Law. Much of the Law is still in effect, such as the Ten Commandments. But a more exacting Law of the Spirit has also come, for with the Law adultery was sin. Now lust in my heart is defined as adultery. But my point is that the righteous Law of God still reveals God’s will for my life. But I am powerless to fulfill that will without Christ living in me and making me a new person.

Therefore we must preach the Law and righteous demands of God, without being legalistic. For the only hope to keep the Law is through the power of the Spirit. We must help people face their moral bankruptcy, but help them realize that they must declare bankruptcy and then call out to God for help. They cannot get themselves out of this moral debt. Does this make sense?

Paul seems to have taken great pains not to offend the Jews by establishing that the Law was good. The problem was not with God’s Law, but man’s heart (even among the Jews). The Jews had a good Law but they still needed Christ. The Gentiles had no Law, only conscience, but they still needed Christ. The conclusion for then and today—we all need Christ.

Day Three

14 We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.
15 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. 16 And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good.
17 As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.
18 I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.

v. 14 – Now Paul shifted his writing to the first person, no longer talking about Jews or Gentiles, but rather himself. He wrote from firsthand experience since Paul had been the quintessential Jew. Read what he wrote about himself to the Philippian church:

If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless (Philippians 3:4-6).

It is my understanding that many Pharisees had memorized large portions of Scripture and we know from Jesus that some of them tithed down to the weeds in their gardens. Paul wrote that where legalistic righteousness was concerned, he was *faultless*. That is a powerful statement. If anyone could have found a shred of usefulness in following the Law, it would have been Paul. But he recognized that while he was able to carry out the system of Jewish Law, he was still a sinner while he did it. And the Law did not have the power to make him righteous; it would only allow him to do some righteous deeds.

v. 15 – There are many who have tried to explain these next verses away, saying that Paul was only speaking hypothetically since he was basically a good man, who had followed the letter of the Law. I find this hard to accept. I think what Paul wrote in these next verses was how he actually saw himself. He was a sinner, unable to perform the righteous deeds that he would have liked to have done.

Paul realized that spiritually had to start from the inside and work its way out. Paul had the outward part down pat, but there was a problem with his heart that the Law could not solve. This is the same dilemma that every human being faces, including you and me. My heart is the problem, for it impairs my ability to perform any righteous deeds.

v. 16 – The Law said to be merciful, and I want to do what is right, but I cannot. I am therefore saying that the Law is good because I desire to do it. But I don't have the power to do it—that is the problem. In essence, this was what Paul was saying.

v. 17 – There is a sin power that resides in me that drives me to sin. This is why I must die and start over again. But this power is similar to the law of inertia—a body in motion tends to stay in motion. A body in sin tends to maintain the momentum in sin. Once I come to Christ, I spend the rest of my days cooperating with the Spirit's initiatives to slow down this sin momentum.

v. 18 – I know many people who are busy spit-shining some good deeds or character strength, in hopes of presenting that to God to prove that there is something good in them after all. But their efforts are futile. Apart from Jesus, I can do nothing. Jesus said it well:

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples" (John 15:5-8).

On my own, I am just a disconnected branch from a tree, that may be green for a while, may even be put in a bucket of water to survive a little longer, but I am really dead. But connected to Jesus, I can do all the things that He wants me to; but He is my source of life.

Day Four

19 For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.

20 Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

21 So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.

22 For in my inner being I delight in God's law;

v. 19 – This almost sounds like Paul is blaming the sin and exonerating himself from any responsibility. But we know from his letters that this is not the case. Paul was simply describing the human condition so that Jews and Gentiles alike would understand why they needed Christ—why the Law wasn't enough to serve God.

v. 20 – Since Paul wasn't ready to move off this subject, neither should we be too eager to move on. Have you ever determined that you weren't going to say something in advance, knowing what you were about to encounter? Yet when you engaged the situation, you said it anyway. Then you came home, feeling bad. That would be an example of what Paul is saying.

Or how about a commitment to get up early and pray? You keep your commitment for a few days and then it falls by the wayside. You had every intention of doing it, but it is like there is another person in you that is working against your efforts to be holy.

Yesterday our church had communion Sunday. As I waited for everyone to be served, I determined to meditate, but my mind kept wandering to any other subject but the Lord and my own condition. It was like I was schizophrenic. I should have taken two portions of communion, one for each of my two personalities!

vs. 21&22 – These two persons in me serve two laws—one wants to know and serve God, the others wants to serve the law of sin. Maybe we should call this the schizophrenia of sin! I am really two people and the only answer is to allow a third person (Christ) in the power of the Spirit to come and mediate the war that is going on between my two “personalities.”

Day Five

23 but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.

24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

25 Thanks be to God-through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

Vs. 23&24 – Part of me rejoices in God’s law but there is another significant part that wages war against me. This phrase “waging war” is literally “lays siege,” surrounds and overpowers the law of the mind to make me a prisoner. That is a graphic example—I am overwhelmed and taken captive by the power of sin. Paul made a case that I could not free myself from sin without outside help and that help was and is Christ. My own efforts could not save me from the ravages of this internal war; the Law could not save me from being taken captive. Only Christ could save me.

Dear reader, perhaps you are overwhelmed in some area right now. Maybe you are facing a financial war, having made your best efforts to succeed, only to be overcome by debt or bankruptcy. Perhaps you have struggled against sin, only to fall victim again and again to its power. Or maybe there is a relationship that is shattered and you have made every effort to find reconciliation. If these or any other examples hold true in your life right now, then I urge you to surrender, not to the problem, but to the source of help, which is mentioned in the next verse.

v. 25 – The Lord Jesus Christ is the answer to your sin problem, but also to every other problem that you have encountered, are encountering or will encounter. You have a heart for God, but find it hard to carry out your desires. Then trust in Jesus. You have struggled to bring healing, victory or deliverance to your life or the lives of those around you. If you have, then trust in Jesus. When someone has glibly urged you to “give it to Jesus,” they may not have understood at all what you were going through. But they did give you the correct advice and it is the same advice I give you today. The only way to win the war you are in is to get reinforcements, and those reinforcements are available through Jesus.

Day Six

8:1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,

2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.

3 For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man,

4 in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

vs. 1&2 – What a statement! In our war-torn moral condition, where two laws are at work in our bodies, there is no condemnation. None, nada, nichoho, nil. But there is no condemnation only for those who are in Christ. If you continue your efforts to resolve this moral conflict, then you will be condemned in your own heart for your efforts will be futile. But if you invite this man Jesus into your life, He will come and bring with Him the Spirit of life that will liberate you from the law of sin and death. What a deal!

Jesus confronted many sinners in his earthly ministry and His objective was to set them free from a life of sin. But He never put them under condemnation; He simply liberated them from their miserable burden. And Jesus is still in the liberation business.

I have watched video of people in oppressed lands and they were jubilant when their liberators came. That is why we have joy, because we realize that our captivity is over, our liberation is complete. Yes, there are pockets of resistance and we must rebuild our war-torn beings, but Jesus has given us the victory.

By way of review, there are three “players” in this drama of life—the law of God, the law of sin and the law of the Spirit of life.

v. 3 – We were powerless to help ourselves so God helped us. He sent Jesus, one of us in every way except sin, and made Him a sin offering. Let’s quickly look at the sin offering as described in the Old Testament:

"If the anointed priest sins, bringing guilt on the people, he must bring to the LORD a young bull without defect as a sin offering for the sin he has committed. He is to present the bull at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting before the LORD. He is to lay his hand on its head and slaughter it before the LORD. Then the anointed priest shall take some of the bull's blood and carry it into the Tent of Meeting. He is to dip his finger into the blood and sprinkle some of it seven times before the LORD, in front of the curtain of the sanctuary. The priest shall then put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of fragrant incense that is before the LORD in the Tent of Meeting. The rest of the bull's blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. He shall remove all the fat from the bull of the sin offering--the fat that covers the inner parts or is connected to them, both kidneys with the fat on them near the loins, and the covering of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys--just as the fat is removed from the ox sacrificed as a fellowship offering. Then the priest shall burn them on the altar of burnt offering. But the hide of the bull and all its

flesh, as well as the head and legs, the inner parts and offal--that is, all the rest of the bull--he must take outside the camp to a place ceremonially clean, where the ashes are thrown, and burn it in a wood fire on the ash heap” (Leviticus 4:3-12).

There is an obvious need to deal with sin, but can you imagine being a priest and having to sacrifice a bull every time you needed forgiveness? The Law taught that the forgiveness for sins was a messy, smelly, and noisy business. And a bull was chosen to cover the sins of the priesthood. Can you see how Jesus was reflected in this sin offering?

1. The bull had to be perfect, without defect.
2. The bull was an animal of strength.
3. The bull had to have his blood shed.
4. The bull had to be “disposed of” outside the camp, away from the main work of the tabernacle or Temple.

Every Old Testament sacrifice was a type or shadow of Christ and the work He would perform according to God’s timing. The priest laid his hands on the bull to lay the sins of the people in the bull, so that when the bull died, the sins he was carrying died with him. Once again, we see the need to have a sacrifice, a death, in order for sins to be erased. Now Jesus’ ultimate and once-and-for-all sacrifice has paid the price for my sin and liberated me to live for God.

If you don’t say, “Thank you, Jesus,” at this point, I don’t think you understand what God had done for you in Christ.

v. 4 – I live in the righteous requirements of the Law because of Jesus, not because of my own efforts. The law required a sacrifice—the shedding of blood—for sin and I have paid that price through Christ. I have laid my hands on Him to identify with His work and now I live in the peace with God that His sacrifice provided. My sinful nature died with Christ and now I live in the power of the Spirit, a power that enables me to carry out God’s righteous commands. Wow!

Day Seven

5 Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.

6 The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace;

7 the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.

8 Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

vs. 5&6 – Those of us who have surrendered to the guidance of the Holy Spirit have set our minds on the Spirit. That is why I urge people with whom I work and teach to take

every thought seriously. Are you thinking about going to Latin American on a missions trip? Assume it is the Lord who put that thought there and take the first faith steps to see how that could take place. Are you contemplating starting a business? Then proceed as though you are certain you have heard from the Lord, whether you are certain or not. While we know that the Spirit lives in us to give us the mind of Christ, we are still surprised when we have that mind. We almost always assume that we do not have it.

I am thinking about two verses from Isaiah:

You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you. Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD, is the Rock eternal (Isaiah 26:3-4).

A steadfast mind is a mind of faith and trust. I trust that even in the cesspool of my own mind, God can speak to me. I do not put my faith in my mind's ability to figure things out; I put my trust in the God of my mind.

v. 7 – A sinful mind that has not turned control over to the Spirit is hostile to God; Paul didn't write that the sinful mind was neutral, but rather hostile to God. You can never expect a nonbeliever to act or think like a believer. It is not a matter of common sense or will power; it is a matter of changing the law under which one lives. If one lives under the law of sin, then his or her mind is hostile to God, period. If one lives under the law of the Spirit, then his or her mind is open to God and the result is peace and life.

While I have turned my mind in principle over to the Spirit, I am still working with the Spirit to bring the pockets of resistance to the Spirit under His guidance and control. That is why my mind needs to be renewed and out of that renewal I will be transformed. More on that in the next study.

v. 8 – Those who are controlled by the law of sin **cannot** please God. Their best efforts and intentions will be fraught with self. Pleasing God is not a matter of will, but of power. A man or woman without the power of the Spirit just doesn't have enough "voltage" to fuel their righteous efforts. It takes a special fuel—the fuel of the Spirit—to do the Spirit's will.

I trust that you will continue to battle to bring your mind under God's control, while at the same time having faith that this is already being done. In faith, what have you been thinking about doing that you are now ready to say, in faith, "this may be God's will"? Whatever it is, what are you willing to do about it **today**?