
ROMANS

PART 6: FREEDOM IN CHRIST, PART 2

ROMANS 7:1-8:39

ROMANS OVERVIEW

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PART 6 OVERVIEW

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FREEDOM FROM THE LAW:

ROMANS 7:1-25

WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH THE LAW?

- As discussed in Part 3 of our study, “the Law” in the book of Romans most commonly refers to the “Mosaic Law,” the series of commandments (613 in total!) that God gave the Israelites in the first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy).
- To the Jewish people, the Law was considered to be an incredible gift: it was the revealed will of God, and *only* the Jewish people had received it. Since the Law came from God Himself, it was considered to be the source of life for the Jewish people:

The law from Your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of gold and silver. – PSALM 119:72 NIV

- Throughout Romans, however, Paul has not been quite as positive on the Law as most Jewish people were. In fact, thus far Paul has made some very disparaging comments about the Law:

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin. – ROMANS 3:20 NIV

...the law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression. – ROMANS 4:15 NIV

The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. – ROMANS 5:20 NIV

For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace. – ROMANS 6:14 NIV

- But why has Paul been so disparaging of the Law? What is his deal with it? This is the subject to which Paul will devote Romans 7.
- The main point of Romans 7 is this: **although the Law itself is good—because it reveals the will of God—before we are Christians the very nature and presence of sin within us twists the Law into something that is bad for us. This makes the Law have the opposite effect of what God intended: instead of bringing life, it brings death. Therefore, the Mosaic Law needs to be abandoned.**
- Two points to keep in mind as we go through Romans 7:
 - First, it's important as we go through the rest of chapter 7 of Romans to understand the perspective that Paul is taking here: **Paul is not talking about a Christian struggling to obey God; he's talking about a pre-Christian struggling to follow the Law.** This will be especially important when we get to the end of Romans 7.
 - Second, this is not just an “academic exercise.” We Christians have to know why we don't believe we have to follow the various commandments of the Old Testament. We also have to know where our authority comes from. Romans 7 tells us this.

FREEDOM FROM THE LAW: ROMANS 7:1-25

THE DECLARATION: YOU ARE DEAD TO THE LAW!

- Paul begins in Romans 7:1-6 by giving an overall declaration to the Law: **just as believers have died to “sin,” so believers have died to the Law!**

¹ Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives?

² For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. ³ So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man.

⁴ Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.

⁵ For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death.

⁶ But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.

– ROMANS 7:1-6

- The “main idea” is in vv. 4-5, with the surrounding verses giving support to it: when believers died with Jesus (see Romans 6), they didn’t just die to “sin” (Romans 6:6-7), they also died to the “Law.”
- The passage can be broken down like this:
 - Romans 7:1 states the general principle: the Law of Moses is only for those who have not yet “died.”
 - As an illustration of this principle, Paul uses the idea of marriage in Romans 7:2-3: a woman is “released” from the obligation to her husband when her husband dies.
 - That leads to Romans 7:4, where Paul makes his “declaration”: when Christ died, we died, and so we are set free from the Law.
 - Romans 7:5-6 gives why this is necessary. Romans 7:5 will be expanded in Romans 7:7-25; Romans 7:6 will be expanded in Romans 8.
- But why is important to note that we have “died” to the Law? How can the Law—which was given by God—end up being a bad thing? This is what Paul “previews” in Romans 7:5, but will expand upon in Romans 7:7-25:

⁵ For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. – ROMANS 7:5

FREEDOM FROM THE LAW: ROMANS 7:1-25

HOW SIN DISTORTS THE LAW (7:7-25)

- Having given his declaration that believers have died to the Law, Paul now talks about why such a “death” is necessary.
- First, it’s important to note that Paul doesn’t believe that the Law itself is bad: since the Law came from the very mouth of God, he wants to make it clear that he believes that the Law is “holy and righteous and good”:

So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. – ROMANS 7:12

- So, if the Law is “holy and righteous and good” then why is Paul so “down” on the Law? It’s because of our sinful nature before we become a Christian.
- The key passage here is Romans 7:7-8:

⁷ What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, “You shall not covet.” ⁸ But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind...
– ROMANS 7:7-8

- The analogy for this point is found in our kids: if you hand a kid a marble with the warning, “Don’t put it in your mouth,” though they may have never thought of putting it in their mouth when you first gave it to them, the very fact that you warned them not to do it makes them think about it (“Don’t think about a purple elephant”) and the temptation to put the marble in their mouth becomes even greater! This, Paul says, is due to our sin nature and the power that sin has over us! This is human nature and can be seen in several different areas in life (even as adults): there is something within us that resists being told what to do at all costs (“You can’t tell me what to do!”).
- That’s why Paul can say this in Romans 7:9-11:

⁹ I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; ¹⁰ and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; ¹¹ for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. – ROMANS 7:9-11

- Though God’s commandments were meant to bring life, our sinful nature actually causes them to result in death for us, since the sin within us drives us to break the very commandments that bring life, leading to God’s judgment upon us and both physical and spiritual death!

“By affixing on Israel clear, unequivocal responsibility for the obedience of fixed commands, the law sealed the death of the people....As good and holy as it was, the Law of God made severe demands on Israel.”

– Douglas Moo, *Encountering Romans*

- Note that Paul makes clear that it’s not *the Law* that brings death, but sin *using* the Law:

But how can that be? Did the law, which is good, cause my death? Of course not! Sin used what was good to bring about my condemnation to death. So we can see how terrible sin really is. It uses God’s good commands for its own evil purposes. – ROMANS 7:13 NLT

FREEDOM FROM THE LAW: ROMANS 7:1-25

- It's in this context that the very famous—and often misinterpreted Romans 7:14-25 comes in:

¹⁴ For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. ¹⁵ For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. ¹⁶ But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. ¹⁷ So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. ¹⁹ For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. ²⁰ But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

²¹ I find then the [n]principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. ²² For I joyfully concur with the law of God [o]in the inner man, ²³ but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. ²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin. – ROMANS 7:14-25

- Historically, this passage has been interpreted as a picture of the “struggle” of the Christian with sin in their life: though we want to do what is right, we often struggle doing it.
- However, this passage is likely not describing a Christian at all! There are a few reasons to believe this:
 - First, why would Paul talk about a Christian’s struggle with the Law when Paul has made it clear that Christians have died to the Law (7:4, 6)? This passage is not fundamentally about a person’s struggle with *sin*, but a person’s struggle to obey the Law!
 - Second, it is very unlikely Paul would ever say that a Christian is “unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin” (7:14) and a “prisoner of the law of sin” (7:23), since Paul declared in the previous chapter that we have “died to sin” (6:11) and thus are no longer “slaves to sin” (7:6).
 - Finally, the “defeatist” attitude that Paul seems to have about our ability to conquer sin in our lives (7:19) is not in keeping with the victory Paul seems to indicate that we have over sin elsewhere in Romans (6:17-18, 22; 8:13).
- Thus in Romans 7:14-25, Paul is not describing the Christian’s struggle with sin, but a “pre-Christian” (i.e. someone from a Jewish background) struggling to obey God’s Law in their own power and by their own ability apart from God’s enabling!
- This has implications for us: if we think that Romans 7:14-25 describes a Christian, then the “defeatist” attitude of the passage could make us think that sin is inevitable and that there is no hope in conquering it. But the Bible is much more positive about our ability to conquer sin in our life, which aids in our defeating it!

FREEDOM FROM THE LAW: ROMANS 7:1-25

- Note that the Bible *does* indicate that there will always be some degree of struggle in a Christian's life with sin, but the Bible is much more positive about our ability to win this battle:

¹⁶ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.

– GALATIANS 5:16-18

Conclusion: Ultimately the Law only gives us the rules of God but gives us no ability to obey it.

- Though the Law is good, the ultimate problem with it is that the Law gives us God's rules, but before we are Christians, our sinful nature makes us unable to obey it. It's like being given sheet music and told to play it when you've never learned how to play an instrument: you know that the sheet music produces beautiful music, but without the ability to play it, there's no way you can perform it. The same is true of God's Law.
- But if we don't have the ability within ourselves to obey God, then how do we have any hope of obeying God? This is what Paul makes clear in Romans 8!

FREEDOM IN THE SPIRIT:

ROMANS 8:1-30

INTRODUCTION

- If we don't have any ability within ourselves to obey God, then how can we do it?
- Paul answers that question via the main theme of Romans 8: through God's Holy Spirit who takes up residence within us and enables us to obey Him!
- Mention of the Holy Spirit has been conspicuously absent up until this point in Romans; He has only been mentioned four times through Romans 7 (1:4; 2:29; 5:5; 7:6).
- But this appears by Paul to be deliberate; Paul apparently wanted to wait until Romans 8 to tell us all about God's Spirit in one section! (The "Spirit" is mentioned 21x's in Romans 8 alone!)
- Romans 8 itself can be divided into three parts:
 - The "Spirit of Obedience" (8:1-13)
 - The "Spirit of Adoption" (8:14-17)
 - The "Spirit of Glory" (8:18-30)

THE "SPIRIT OF OBEDIENCE" (8:1-13)

- The first thing that Paul makes clear about the Holy Spirit is that **it is the Holy Spirit who enables us to do what God has asked us to do.**
- Here Paul contrasts two ways of life: those who live "according to the flesh" vs. those who live "according to the Spirit." It is clear that this is not a contrast between two different ways for a Christian to live, but a contrast between a non-Christian's way of life (those who live "according to the flesh") and a Christian's way of life (those who live "according to the Spirit"):
 - Those who live "according to the flesh":

⁵ For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, ⁷ because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, ⁸ and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. – ROMANS 8:5-8

FREEDOM IN THE SPIRIT: ROMANS 8:1-30

- Those who live “according to the Spirit”:

⁹ However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. ¹⁰ If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is ¹⁴alive because of righteousness. ¹¹ But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. ¹² So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— ¹³ for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. – ROMANS 8:9-13

- The point that Paul makes is clear: though Christians are “set free from the Law,” this does not mean that a Christian will live a life of sinfulness. By the power of God’s Spirit within us, we will begin to do what God has asked us to do, fulfilling a new “law”—the “law of Christ”:

*to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God **but under the law of Christ**, so that I might win those who are without law. – 1 CORINTHIANS 9:21*

THE “SPIRIT OF ADOPTION” (8:14-17)

- The second role that the Spirit has in our lives is that He confirms our adoption as God’s children:

¹⁴ For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” ¹⁶ The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. – ROMANS 8:14-17

- Once again, Paul makes it clear that we are to have “assurance” as Christians: God wants us to be sure of the fact that we have been adopted by Him, and this occurs through an inner witness of God’s Spirit within us that we are, indeed, His children.

“Ultimately the text describes a religious experience that is ineffable, for the witness of the Holy Spirit with the human spirit that one is a child of God is mystical in the best sense of the word...the confident articulation that God is one’s Father stems from a certainty in the heart that transcends human comprehension.”

- Thomas Schreiner, *Romans*

FREEDOM IN THE SPIRIT: ROMANS 8:1-30

THE “SPIRIT OF GLORY” (8:18-30)

- Finally, Paul describes how the Spirit aids us in moving towards the “glory” that will be revealed in us at the end of time.
- Paul begins this section by making it clear that all that God does for us doesn’t mean that we won’t have to suffer in this life—Christ Himself suffered, and so suffering is an expected part of the Christian life. But the sufferings we experience are not worthy, Paul says, to be compared to the day that we will be revealed fully as God’s children, glorified along with Him in eternity:

¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us... ²³ And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.

– ROMANS 8:18, 23

- Until that day comes, Paul promises that God’s Spirit will use everything—including our suffering—to turn out for our “good,” which in context refers to the character of Christ being formed within us.

²⁶ In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; ²⁷ and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

²⁸ And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.²⁹ For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; ³⁰ and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. – ROMANS 8:26-30

- Romans 8:28, one of the more famous verses in the Bible, is contained in this section. It is important to note that Paul is not saying here that everything *is* good, but that everything *works out* for “good.” And as v. 29 shows, the “good” being talked about is conformity to the image of Christ. Paul tells us in this passage that the Holy Spirit is in constant dialogue with God, using even our sufferings to turn us more into the image of Jesus. The end result will (ultimately) be rewards when we stand before God at the end of time!

CONCLUDING THOUGHT (8:31-39): CELEBRATING OUR SECURITY IN CHRIST

NO ONE CAN BRING A CHARGE AGAINST US!

- If even our sufferings can be used by God to bring about good within us (8:26-30), then Paul draws out the natural conclusion of this in Romans 8:31-39. He begins with this great statement:

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? – ROMANS 8:31

- The “these things” probably refers both to what Paul just said in Romans 8:26-30 *and* goes all of the way back, encompassing Romans 5-8. In everything, God has shown that He is for us; if that is the case, no one can really be against us!

“Yet these that be against us, so far are they from thwarting us at all, that even without their will they become to us the causes of crowns, and procurers of countless blessings, in that God’s wisdom turneth their plots into salvation and glory. See how really no one is against us!”

- John Chrysostom, *Archbishop of Constantinople*

- Romans 8:32-34 turns into a “courtroom” scene, with the prosecuting attorney bringing charges against us. But since God is the judge—and since He is on our side—each charge is summarily dismissed:

³² He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? ³³ Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies; ³⁴ who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. – ROMANS 8:32-34

FINALLY, NO ONE CAN SEPARATE US FROM GOD’S LOVE!

- Paul concludes this chapter by talking about how immense God’s love is for us: though we still will have to go through trials in this life, nothing can stand in the way of God’s love and us:

³⁵ Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ Just as it is written, “For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” ³⁷ But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. – ROMANS 8:35-39

“[In Romans 8:38-39], Paul mentions every possible sphere of existence in order to make absolutely clear that nothing in all creation can interfere with God’s love for us in Christ.”

- Douglas Moo, *Encountering Romans*

APPLICATION: GOD IS FOR US

1. Romans 8:31 is an “arresting” verse:

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? – ROMANS 8:31

2. What Paul is saying here is that nothing can *truly* be against us, because God is always for us—and even the things that seem to be against us can be used by God for our “good” (Romans 8:28-29).
3. This reminds me of Chuck Swindoll’s famous quote:

“Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react to it.”

- Chuck Swindoll

4. If Romans 8:31 is true (and it is), Chuck’s quote is right-on: when we realize God can use everything in our life for our “good,” life becomes first and foremost about opportunities: opportunities to see God move in our life and use even the difficult things to mold us and shape us more like Jesus.
5. Can you imagine what it would look like—and how it would impact you—to see everything—including the tough stuff—as an opportunity to see God move? I think it would revolutionize our lives.
6. Doing this is admittedly hard. But the end result is worth the effort.
7. Therefore, the question for this session:

How can you start seeing opportunities instead of problems?

How can you see every circumstance in your life as something God can use to make you more like Jesus?

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Read Romans 7:7-11. Do you have an example in your life of a “law” or “rule” having the opposite of its intent—rather than make you *not* want to do something, the very presence of the rule made you want to do it? Describe that experience to the group. How have you seen Romans 7:11 lived out in your life?¹
2. This week, we gave a (perhaps) controversial interpretation of Romans 7:14-25. Read that passage again, perhaps in a couple of different translations.
 - a. Does what you heard in this study bring any new insight into this passage? Do you agree or disagree with the interpretation given? Why?
 - b. If you disagree with the interpretation given in this study, how do you explain the three points in the middle of page 60?
 - c. If you agree with the interpretation given in this study, how does that influence how you think about your ability to conquer sin in your life? (Perhaps read again what Paul says in Romans 6:17-18.)
3. Read Romans 8:1-13. Among other things, Paul in this passage contrasts those who are in the “flesh” (non-Christians) and those who are in the “Spirit” (Christians). What does Paul say about those who are in the “flesh”? How do they live? What is their relationship with God? How does this contrast with those who are in the “Spirit”?
4. Read Romans 8:18-30. According to this passage, what are the various things that God’s Spirit does for us? What do you think Paul means when he says that God’s Spirit “intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words” (8:26)? How does knowledge of this influence how you think about the circumstances that you are going through?
5. How have you seen an example of Romans 8:28-29 in your own life—God using even bad circumstances to make you more like Jesus?
6. Read Romans 8:31-39. How do these verses give us assurance in the midst of the suffering and struggle of this life? How would it change your perspective to know that in *all* things God is “for” us?
7. Read points #3-7 on page 66. What could you do daily to start see “opportunities” instead of “problems” in your life?

¹ Some questions in this section adapted from N.T. Wright, *Romans* (N.T. Wright Bible Studies for Everyone).