

## The Epistle to the Romans

### Ch. 7

**V**alentine's Day is coming, so Jim asks his pal Herb, "D'ja get something for your wife yet?" "Yep, got her a new belt and a new bag." Jim says, "I bet she'll love 'em." "Hope so," says Herb, "they should make the ol' vacuum cleaner work better now."

Right idea, wrong execution! That sounds like a certain self-righteous law-schooled Pharisee, born to Jewish parents. Saul, as Paul was first known, was fanatically religious but very wrong. He tried to wipe out Jesus Christ's first followers. In a surprise move, Jesus spun Saul's life around and tasked this Roman citizen (now called Paul) with being God's voice to Gentiles (Galatians 1:11-24).

Reports of Jesus' life, death and resurrection thirty years earlier had raced from Jerusalem across the Empire's sprawling highway tentacles, relayed by exuberant, new Christ-believers. Since Roman Christians had only the Old Testament, Paul writes this letter to introduce the new way of getting right with God (Romans 3:21-27).

### *Paul's 6-Pack*

In chs. 1-6 Paul lays the foundation, saying God wired us to know right from wrong and that there is a Creator (2:15). Adam and Eve ate forbidden fruit, leaving the human race to be stained by sin from birth (3:23). But because He loves us so, God the Father sent His Son to be the perfect sacrifice for our sin, offering us lasting forgiveness which we receive by faith (2 Corinthians 5:17-21).

Because his Jewish readers believed they must *earn* God's approval, Paul cites their heroes, Abraham and David, as having been accepted by God based on their *faith*, not their good *works* (4:3-6).

As Christ's folks in Caesar's capital did in the winter of AD 57-58, **let's now read Romans 7:1-8:4 (p. 330, Msg).**

### *Torn Between Two Lovers* *Romans 7:1-6*

God and civil law agree: polygamy is out. Legal marriage ends when a spouse dies. We can't be wed simultaneously to "The Law of Sin and Death" and "The Law of Life in Christ," so Jesus' death canceled the former to give us the latter. When Paul unveiled

“the mystery,” religious laws, rituals, sacrifices et al were replaced by faith alone, freeing Jews and non-Jews to be made “right” with God permanently (Galatians 2:20-21; Colossians 1:24-29).

God remembers our sins no more (Hebrews 8:12). He’ll *never* “divorce” us (8:38-39)! Jesus defanged sin and death for us. When a believer sins, God doesn’t love him less. Sin has consequences for believers in this life but not in the next, having been pardoned from eternal exile in a hellish, inescapable place (John 3:36).

**DISCUSS: What was your earliest understanding of sin and how to be forgiven by God, or if being forgiven was even necessary?**

### *Those Wretched, Miserable Christians* *Romans 7:7-23*

Do you ever do what you really *don't* want to do, and *don't* do what you really *want* to do? (Aha, a fellow golfer!) Paul lived in that wretched tension before and after being “born again.” Jesus came to set us free from sin’s chains, but out of habit we still sin (Galatians 5:1). Our human solution: “do more and try harder.”

**DISCUSS: Why isn’t it enough to just live a good, moral life?**

### *Problem, Solution* *Romans 7:24-8:4*

Willpower and the Law produce either self-righteousness or guilt. We can’t live the Christian life; only Christ can, in us (5:1). Until we know that, we wonder, “Am I really a Christian? This can’t be God’s idea of the ‘victorious, abundant life!’ Somebody, HELP me!”

In his next breath (early manuscripts had no chapter breaks) Paul unwraps God’s shocker-solution: God’s not obsessed with the believer’s sin since He’d already placed it on Christ, judged it and forgiven it at the cross. You’re now free to say “no” to sin and “yes” to Christ’s Spirit in you. **You are who God says you are!** Legalism induces self-doubt. Like a dog’s tail, feelings follow who’s holding the leash. You’re *in Christ*, so **let God’s facts trump how you feel.**

Crazy as it may seem, God never “condemns” a believer for sinning because you’re *in Christ*, and *Christ is in you*, and God’s not about to be angry at His Son. You’re God’s adopted son, as right with Him as Jesus is! This is the new you. It’s who you are! So, let’s live like it!

When you, the believer, sin, you may feel *convicted*, but God does not *condemn* you for sinning. This is when we go to God with confidence for mercy and grace when we need help (Hebrews 4:16).

## **DISCUSS: What's the difference between conviction and condemnation?**

### ***“Walk Like A Man” (God's Man)***

"Do It Yourself Christianity" fails. The solution is to let God's Spirit transform how we think (12:1-2). Hang out with God. Let His Spirit control your soul (i.e., mind, emotions and will). The self-centered soul insists on deciding its destiny, seeking God only on an "as-needed" basis. Religion gives the soul the pretense of attaining godliness by *doing*, not *being*. But the spirit is where Christ-in-you lives, if your life is *in Him*. So, your spirit needs to rule your soul.

Here's one of Paul's most puzzling, yet most comforting revelations:

### **“ALL things are working together for GOOD for those who love God” (8:28).**

We rest in His promises, knowing “God will do what He says He will do,” and “With Christ you can deal with anything.” Our “Director” in Master Control (our spirit) wants us (our soul and body) to respond to Him by trusting His script, not by ad libbing our own.

Sarah Young writes in *Jesus Calling*, as if Jesus is speaking to you, “Do not be ashamed of your emptiness. Instead, view it as the optimal condition for being filled with My Peace. ... Talk with Me about your struggles and feelings of inadequacy. Little by little, I will transform your weaknesses into strengths. ... nothing that you do or don't do can separate you from My Presence (8:38-39).”

## **DISCUSS: Why do so many people think God is out to get them?**

What is the “GOOD” that ALL things are working together for? God is shaping believers into Jesus' image, often using the tools of pain (8:29). Why should we get off easier than Jesus did? Paul was content to suffer in this life for the joy of knowing and serving God.

### ***Fireproof Identity***

God gives you a new identity when He comes to live in your spirit. “Christ in you” and you “in Christ” – that's who the believer really is. Satan wants you to think you don't need Christ -- just “try harder and do more.” No. God *makes* us right with Himself as a *free gift* when we put our trust in Him (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Have you done that? If not, why delay? In your own words tell God, “I'm tired of this struggle, tired of stalling. Here's my life; it's all yours, Father. Come live in and through

me. Thank You for giving me a new start, all my sins totally forgiven, never to be condemned by You. What a deal! Thank You, Jesus.”

His Deal

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