

THE LETTER OF PAUL TO THE ROMANS

Lesson 10 – Study Questions

Romans 7:1-25

Review: *From your experience at the Cornerstone meeting last week, share something that helped build your faith.*

NOTE: If Romans is the most difficult of Paul's Letters, Romans 7 is the most challenging section of the letter to interpret. There are several reasons for this. One is that Paul makes use of analogy to expound an essential truth of the gospel but leaves it to readers to finish connecting the dots. Another is that Paul examines the struggle against sin both through the lens of his theological convictions and in the light of personal experience. More than anything, Romans 7 tackles an extremely complicated subject in a highly compressed way. In a mere handful of verses Paul attempts to explain how the desires of sin fight against the demands of the law and how this creates a dilemma in the lives of God's people. Ultimately, the problem laid out in Romans 7 is a buildup to the solution to be revealed in Romans 8. *Hahn and Mitch*

DAY ONE

Read Romans 7:1-3

THINK: In the second volume of *Jesus of Nazareth*, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI emphasizes that eternal life begins in the "here." Benedict says "early Christians called themselves simply 'the living.' They had found what all are seeking – life itself, full and, hence, indestructible life." Now centuries later, the success of the New Evangelization rests upon Christians who are genuinely alive in the joy of Christ. Rational arguments and instructions have a place in this great movement, but a Christian life well lived is the ultimate weapon. And how can we not be joyful at the realization that true life, eternal life, is already within us through our relationship with Christ? *Eternal Life, Here and Now, David G. Bonagura, Jr.*

1. Today we begin chapter 7, which continues thoughts begun in chapter 6. In verse 1 of today's lesson, Paul begins by addressing his "brothers and sisters". Refer to our Commentary and share what purpose could be served by using this term.

2. Paul says that he is speaking to those who know the law, thus to the Roman Jewish Christians. He then questions their understanding of the law as binding only during that person's lifetime (end of verse 1). His main point is that death brings release from the law. To what "death" is he referring?

3. Paul may seem to fluctuate regarding the importance of the Mosaic law; yet at the heart of the law are the Ten Commandments (the Decalogue). Read Matthew 5:17-20 and briefly summarize what Christ said regarding the true laws of God.

4. Msgr. Mikesch says: "Through baptism into the person of Jesus, Christians have died a death to sin and the law. Because of this death, Christians are no longer subject to sin and no longer bound by the precepts of the Mosaic Law." Yet we are human and as such, our obedience to God falters and we sin. What is our "armor" in the battle against sin?

5. According to verses 2-3, a woman is no longer bound by law to her husband after his death, illustrating the point Paul made in verse 1. Who or what do you think Paul intends for the woman to represent symbolically? Who or what do you think the husband symbolizes? (you may wish to refer to the Commentary)

6. CONNECTION: In today's verses Paul uses the analogy of marriage to describe the relationship between the old Covenant and the new Covenant.

Although Christians are still obliged to follow the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament, with Jesus' passion, death and resurrection, salvation no longer depends simply on compliance with the law. Choose one of the Ten Commandments and describe the difference in meaning under the Old and New Covenants (refer to Matthew 22:34-40).

Pray today that you may keep the Commandments close to your heart.

DAY TWO

Read Romans 7:4-6

7. Paul references Mosaic law a number of times in his epistles. Sometimes he mentions them specifically; other times he is less direct. Read 1 Timothy 1:8 and note how he defines when a law is good.

8. In verse 4 Paul says that Christians have died to the law through the body of Christ. Now that we belong to him who has been raised from the dead, what should be the outcome of this new union according to the end of verse 4?

9a. In verse 5 the phrase "living in the flesh" means living by the impulses of our fallen nature. "Paul often speaks of 'the flesh', not as the body per se, but as the whole range of weaknesses we inherited from Adam." (*Ignatius Bible Study*)
What was at work when the Jewish Christians were living in the flesh?

b. These "weaknesses" also produced a result. According to the end of verse 5 what was the result?

10. In verse 6 Paul repeats his theme saying, “But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.” Carefully consider this statement. If you are discharged from the law, can you do anything you want? Why or why not?

11. At the end of verse 6, Paul again uses the imagery of slavery, but in a positive sense. In your own words explain how Paul might consider this kind of “slavery” to be a good thing.

12. CONNECTION: In Matthew 5:17 Jesus said: "Do not think that I came to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill." In Romans, Saint Paul tries to explain these words in a way that will promote unity between the Jewish and Gentile Christians. In what sense would his words indeed promote unity? How do the Law and the Spirit work together in your life?

In St. Augustine's, *On the Spirit and the Letter*, Augustine reconciled the relationship between the Law and the Spirit in the following way: “The Law was given so that grace might be sought; and grace was given so that the Law might be obeyed.” Let thoughts of love and obedience lead you into prayer.

DAY THREE

Read Romans 7:7-10

13. As today's lesson begins, Paul declares that the law is not sin, yet had it not been for the law, he would not have known sin. How does he illustrate this relationship at the end of verse 7?

NOTE: In one sense believers have put them (sins) behind them in baptism, but in another they remain part of the ongoing struggle to be Christ-like. *O'Connor*

14. The commandment not to covet (Exodus 20:17) is a good law; but in verse 8 Paul says that the law "produced in him all sorts of covetousness." Refer to Msgr. Mikesch's Commentary to explain this challenging concept.

15. Human beings seem to have a natural attraction toward anything which is forbidden. Share some thoughts on why you think this is true.

THINK: Cardinal Martini, in his book *The Gospel According to St. Paul* says, "...the enemy of the human race is at work. He tries, through the simplest, most hidden, and most subtle ways, to make each of us lose our faith and hope, offering us a life of resignation without the context of God's plan of salvation to give it any meaning."

16. In verse 9 Paul says that he was alive before the law but then sin entered with the commandments. What happened next? (refer to the Commentary for clarification)

17. The commandments from God are good. Even so, according to verse 10, what was the effect of the commandment on Paul?

18. CONNECTION: One of the attractions of transgressing a law is the false sense of freedom. The person seems to say, “I will do what I want. No one is going to tell me what I can or cannot do.” In reality, to transgress God’s laws leads to slavery to sin. “Sin showed its diabolical nature by using the commandments to separate people from God.” (*Commentary*) How would you explain the freedom that comes from living in a Christ-like manner?

Read and record 2 Corinthians 3:17. Let the freedom of Christ’s love within you lead you into prayer.

DAY FOUR

Read Romans 7:11-13

19. In today’s study Paul continues his description of the relationship between the law and sin. In verse 11 Paul describes this relationship saying, “For sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.” Record one way in which sin can deceive us.

20. How does Msgr. Mikesch explain Paul’s statement that says sin killed him?

21. In verse 12 Paul describes the law and the commandment as holy, just and good. What point could he be trying to make?

22. In verse 13 Paul poses a rhetorical question that allows him to express why the law is good. Complete the verse:

Did what is good, then, bring death to me?

It was sin, working death in me

in order that sin might be shown

and through the commandment

23. We learn that the law is good because it shows us what is sinful. According to the end of verse 13, intentionally doing an act that one knows is sinful makes it even more sinful. Share an example of this.

NOTE: CCC 1859 discusses the intentionality of sin and its consequences. “Mortal sin requires *full knowledge* and *complete consent*. It presupposes knowledge of the sinful character of the act, of its opposition to God’s law. It also implies a consent sufficiently deliberate to be a personal choice. Feigned ignorance and hardness of heart do not diminish, but rather increase, the voluntary character of a sin.”

24. CONNECTION: Paul emphasizes that "the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good." If we accept the truth of Paul's statement, then we can recognize that following God's laws and Christ's commandments will lead us closer to him and closer to righteousness; however, "sin, which seeks to sabotage our attempts at keeping God's laws, is a spiritual pathology." (*Hahn and Shea*) Can you think of an instance when you did something “right” in fulfilling God’s commands, even though it was difficult for you? Did you experience the joy of doing what is right?

Read and record Deuteronomy 11:18. Like the Jews, we have been given the commandments as a guide to living good lives.

Memorizing scripture verses is one way to write God's words on our hearts. This week consider committing a verse from the lesson to memory. Pray about making "memory verses" a part of your faith walk.

DAY FIVE

Read Romans 7:14-19

NOTE: Romans Chapter 7 is dominated by the topic of the law. "We might well ask why this is so. Has not Paul, in the interests of his "inclusive" gospel, sufficiently demonstrated the replacement of the law by faith in the first main section of the letter (1:18-4:25)? Why does the law re-emerge as a central issue in the part of the letter devoted to the hope of salvation (chapters 5-8)? The answer is bound up with the principle that has been central all through, that salvation depends upon righteousness, upon being found righteous in God's sight at the judgment." *Sacra Pagina*

25. In the last section of chapter 7, the NRSVCE places verses 14-25 under the heading "The Inner Conflict." The NABRE calls the same section "The Interior Conflict between Good and Evil." What methods do you use to discern good from evil?

26. In verse 14, Paul states that "the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin." Record verse 15. (Good memory verse)

THINK: Can we perhaps, like Paul, hear our own voice questioning our sinful actions?

27. In verse 16 Paul says that he does the things he does not want to do. This in turn shows that the law is good. How do you think Paul comes to this conclusion? (refer to the Commentary for help with your answer)

28. In verse 17 Paul speaks of his dilemma, saying that sin dwells within him. Which of the following do you see as a common sin dwelling within human beings? Share an example and/or an antidote:

Pride

Envy

Sloth

Covetousness

THINK: Haven't we all been trapped in the dilemma between what we know is good for us and what we want to do! The Roman poet Ovid gave classic formulation to this in *Metamorphoses* saying, "I see the better way and I approve it, but I follow the worse." *Sacra Pagina*

29. Paul continues his theme, stating that "once again nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh." How does he end verse 18?

30. CONNECTION: Paul laments that he doesn't do the good he wants to do but commits the very sins he hates (verse 19). From time to time, and possibly often, we find ourselves in situations when we ask, "Why did I say that when I know it's not good?" or "Why do I do that when I know it's not right?" In spite of the darkness of these verses, we as Christian believers have hope in the Spirit. "For his followers Christ's victory is a victory only in principle; it must be translated into reality with the aid of the Spirit." (*O'Connor*) How does the Spirit help you to obey God's laws?

Read and record Psalm 37:23-24. Write a prayer today with gratefulness for God's ongoing mercy and forgiveness and ask for the strength of the Spirit in your weakness.

DAY SIX

Read Romans 7:20-25

NOTE: In today's verses Paul continues his examination of the power of sin. He once again repeats his proposal that sin has great power over our human choices. Paul's own conversion is an example of how the indwelling presence of God can change a person.

31. Although he is still plagued by his fallen nature, share a thought or two regarding how different he is at the time this Letter to the Romans was written, compared with the time he condoned the stoning of Stephen. Refer to Acts 7:58 and 8:1-3.

32. In verse 21 Paul intentionally uses the word "law" in a different sense than he has been using it previously. In your own words what is Paul saying in verse 21?

33. In today's study we will come to the resolution of Paul's struggle. According to verse 22, even though sin has power Paul "delights in the law of God in his inmost self." What do you think Paul means by the "inmost self?"

34. In verse 23 Paul sees his cravings toward sin at war with the law of his mind. What does Paul see as the outcome of this battle he describes?

35a. With verse 24 Paul has reached the depths of despair. He cries out for help. What does he say?

b. At the very end of verse 24 Paul shares, as described in the *Ignatius Bible Study*, "the desperate cry of humanity." Record the first sentence of verse 25, which affirms how we are saved from the captivity of sin and the resulting despair. (Good memory verse)

THINK: Pause now, reader, and ask “Do I understand myself?” Outside the window of your soul lies a land of rest, with deep green glades and chattering brooks and fresh mountains rising against the sky. It is a land of peace, and youth renewed, and love, and something in one of the forgotten alleys of your heart cries out for it. Then why turn back to the dim little cell of your sin? *Cameron*

36. CONNECTION: At the end of verse 25 Paul reminds his readers once again that the battle continues. Even after baptism and the presence of Christ within us, there are times when the power of sin captures us. We are still subject to “concupiscence” or the inclination to sin, but this is not a reason for despair because we know of the forgiveness and love of our God. Like Paul, we may experience times when sin seems to dominate us. Given this human tendency, what are practical ways you could avoid sin?

Read and record John 16:33. Today write a prayer asking for God’s power to overcome the specific areas of your life that sin holds captive.

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