

Romans 6-8

BACKGROUND

- It's estimated that a third of those living in the Roman Empire were slaves, and probably an even larger portion of those in the early Christian church. This makes the slavery metaphor particularly relevant to Paul's audience.
- One didn't pay the owner to emancipate a slave. Instead, the price of the slave was given to a local temple. It was understood that this transferred ownership to the god of that temple.
- "Adoption was common among the Greeks and Romans, who granted the adopted son all the privileges of a natural son, including inheritance rights." (*NIV Study Bible*)
- Unlike in the modern West, in the ancient world, it was common for a son to take the trade of his father: the son of a farmer was most likely a farmer, the son of the cobbler made shoes, etc. So to be a son of God implies that one does what God does; to be a son of God is share God's righteousness. (Cf. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God*.)

QUESTIONS

1. Paul refers to the law, though holy (7:12) as arousing our sinful passions (7:4). He says that the "very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me" (7:11); the law, in fact, is what brings sin to life (7:8).
On the other hand, the psalmist in Ps 119 delights in God's decrees (16) and the "wondering things in your law" (18), for which his "consumed with longing... at all times" (20).

How can the Psalmist see the law as such a delight and Paul see it as such a trap? (Cf. 119:11, Jer 31:33, Ezek 11:19-20, 36:26.)

2. What are Paul's imperatives in these chapters—i.e., what are the Romans told to do? See 6:12-14; 6:19; 8:5; 8:14.
3. Listen to and discuss the audio clip from a teaching by Dennis McCallum on Romans 6:12-14.
4. What is the problem presented in Romans 7:14-25, and how is it solved in chapter 8?
5. Given the OT history of Israel (rebellion → warning → exile → repentance → remnant), how would a first-century Jewish Christian read Paul's assurances that Christians can't suffer condemnation (8:1) and can't be separated from God (8:37-39)? Consider the main argument of Romans as summarized by Gordon Fee:

...the Spirit is the experiential key to the whole [argument]: God in love is creating a people for his name, apart from the Law, composed of Jew and Gentile alike and made possible and effective through the death and resurrection of Christ. All of this is actualized in the church (and the believer as well, of course) by the Spirit whom God has given.¹

How does Paul's theology address the Jewish-Gentile tensions especially present in the Roman church?

6. Chapter 8 leaves some room for interpolation on the part of the reader as to how sanctification is lived out. Some writers, such as Watchman Nee, see sanctification as being realized when we focus on what's been accomplished through Christ:

I once stayed in America in the home of a saved couple who, soon after my arrival, requested me to pray for them. I inquired the cause of their trouble. "Oh, Mr. Nee, we have been in a bad way lately," they confessed. "We are so easily irritated by the children, and during the past few weeks we have both lost our tempers several time a day. We are really dishonoring the Lord. Will you ask him to give us patience?" "That is the one thing I cannot do," I said. "What do you mean?" they asked. "I mean that one thing is certain," I answered, "and that is that God is not going to answer your prayer." At this they said in

¹ *God's Empowering Presence*, p. 517.
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amazement, “Do you mean to tell us that we have gone so far that God is not willing to hear us when we ask him to make us patient?” “No, I do not mean quite that, but I would like to ask you if you have ever prayed in this respect. You have. But did God answer? No! Do you know why? Because you have no need of patience.” Then the wife’s eyes flashed. “What are you saying?” she burst out. “We do not need patience, and yet we get irritated the whole day long! It doesn’t make sense. What do you mean?” Quietly I replied, “It is not patience you have need of. It is Christ.”

...We have spoken of trying and trusting, and the difference between the two. Believe me, it is the difference between heaven and hell. It is not something just to be talked over as a satisfying thought; it is stark reality. “Lord, I cannot do it, therefore I will no longer try to do it.” This is the point most of us fall short of. “Lord, I cannot; therefore I will take my hands off; from now on I will trust *thee* for that.” We refuse to act; we depend on him to do so, and then we enter fully and joyfully into the action he initiates. It is not passivity; it is a most active life, trusting in the Lord like that; drawing life from him, taking him to be our very life, letting him live his life in us as we go forth in his name.²

If Nee recommends a very cognitive approach, Gordon Fee recommends a different balance:

...As in Gal 5:16-25 and despite the passive “are led by the Spirit” that follows [in 8:15], neither is there a hint of triumphalism in Paul—as this text makes clear. Spirit people they are to be sure, and that as an act of pure grace; as such they must put to death the deeds of the body (cf. 13:12-14). They are not merely passive recipients or onlookers, nor is anything automatic. They must engage in the life of the Spirit. [Fee, *ibid.*, 556.]

- a. How much of what Paul describes is cognitive (modifying your “self-talk,” meditating on grace, etc.), and how much is active (e.g., engaging in the disciplines of Christian life)? What does Paul mean in 8:5 by setting “their minds on the things of the Spirit,” or in the similar statement of Romans 12:2, “be transformed by the renewing of your mind”?
 - b. In Romans 8, what does the Spirit *do*?
7. In Rom 8:15 Paul says the Spirit bears witness with our spirit when we cry “Abba! Father!” What does Paul mean by this? Similarly, in Ephesians 1:14 the Spirit is described as a guaranteeing deposit. Presumably this is only encouraging or meaningful if the work of the Spirit is visible. Discuss.
 8. Paul describes pre-Christian life in 6:20+: “When you were slaves to sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death. But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification.” He later adds in 7:5, “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.”

Do your non-Christian friends fit this description as living shameful lives as slaves to sinful passions? Can you see a difference between them and your brothers and sisters in Christ at RCRC? Or a difference between non-Christians and American evangelicals? If not, why not?

Fun quotation: “[Romans] is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul. It can never be read or pondered too much, and the more it is dealt with the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes.” (Luther, “Preface to the Epistle to the Romans,” 1522.)

² *The Normal Christian Life* (Tyndale, 1985), pp. 181, 183. According to Wikipedia, Nee was a Chinese Christian author and church leader during the early 20th Century. He spent the last 20 years of his life in prison enduring persecution. With others, Nee founded the The Church Assembly Hall, later which would be also known as the ‘Local churches.’”