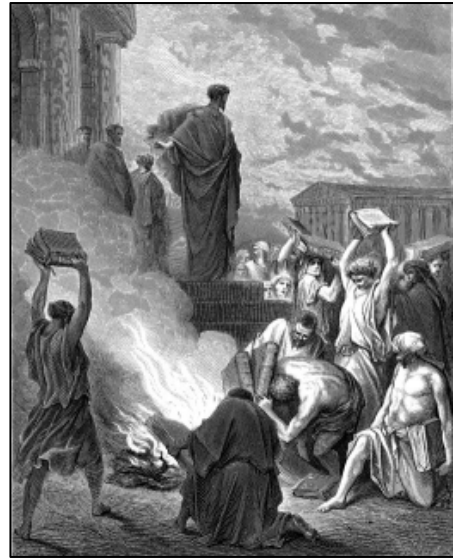


## Romans 7:14-8:39

1. What is the problem presented in Romans 7:14-25?
2. In Romans 8, how does Paul describe the role of the Holy Spirit in addressing the problem of 7:14-25?<sup>1</sup>
3. In Paul's description of sanctification, God himself, through his Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:8) works our sanctification, as we are "transformed into his likeness with every-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (cf. 2 Cor 3:7-18; also 1 Thess 5:23-24). But Gordon Fee sees Paul as recommending an active role in spiritual growth:

...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.]



Gustave Doré, *St. Paul at Ephesus*  
(depicting Acts 19:19)

- a. Read Gal 5:16-25; 6:8-10. *In this passage*, how do we appropriate the change in nature which occurred when we were baptized into Christ? (See also 1 Thess 4:1-7; Rom 6:19-22.)
  - b. In John 8:31-36 Jesus also uses the metaphor of freedom from slavery to describe the process of sanctification. What is the engine of change in this passage?<sup>2</sup>
  - c. Back to Romans 8: 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"?<sup>3</sup>
4. A typical feature of Paul's letters is a list of dos and don'ts—lists of advice for holy living (E.g. Rom 12:9-21; Gal 5:19-23; 1 Thess 4:1-11, etc.). Lists like this of virtues and vices, called in Greek *paraenesis*, meaning "advice," were common in the ancient world.

Paul has said we are free from the law. Why is he listing dos and don'ts? Isn't that the same old thing?<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In case you're curious, here's John Stott's answer: "Looking back now over the first half of Romans 8, we have seen something of the multiple ministries of the Holy Spirit. He has liberated us from the bondage of the law (2), while at the same time he empowers us to fulfill its just requirement (4). We now live each day according to the Spirit and set our minds on his desires (5). He lives in us (9), gives life to our spirits (10), and will one day give life to our bodies too (11). His indwelling obliges us to live his way (12), and his power enables us to put to death our body's misdeeds (13). He leads us as God's children (14) and bears witness to our spirit that this is what we are (15-16). He himself is also the foretaste of our inheritance in glory (17, 23). It is his indwelling which makes the fundamental difference between Romans 8 and Romans 8." [*The Message of Romans* (IVP, 1994), p. 236.]

<sup>2</sup> Also consider 1 Jn 2:15-17, which says we must be careful not to love the world.

<sup>3</sup> Gary DeLashmutter's answer: "Spiritual growth begins not with our behavior (what we do) or with our experiences (what we feel)—but with our minds (how we think)... As we learn to set our minds on what God wants them set on, the power of the Holy Spirit is unleashed to gradually transform our characters and behavior ("the requirement of the law fulfilled... life") and also grant us increasing experience of God's peace."

<sup>4</sup> Again, Stott's answer: "The flesh renders the law impotent, the Spirit empowers us to obey it. This is not perfectionism; it is simply to say that obedience is a necessary and possible aspect of Christian discipleship. Although the law cannot secure this

5. Consider next what Scripture says of the visible evidence of the Spirit. In Rom 8:15 Paul says the Spirit bears witness with our spirit when we cry “Abba! Father!” In Ephesians 1:14 Paul speaks a word of encouragement by describing the Spirit as “a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession.” Presumably this is only meaningful if the work of the Spirit is evident. In 1 John we find the Holy Spirit not just a promise of things to come, but of our present relationship with God: “this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.” The visible evidence of the indwelling Spirit is also fundamental in the decision of the Jerusalem Council not to require Gentiles to be circumcised in Acts 15:5-12.
  - a. Beginning with Rom 8:15, what does Paul mean by the Spirit bearing witness when we cry “Abba! Father!”? (See also Gal 4:6.)
  - b. Read Acts 15:5-12. What evidence is being presented that the Gentiles are saved despite not following the Law of Moses?
  - c. What in your life is evidence of the Spirit in you, and thus evidence of your salvation, and promise of full redemption and sanctification in the world to come? (See again Gal 5:22-24.)
6. Gordon Fee summarizes the main argument of Romans as follows:
 

...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.<sup>5</sup>

  - a. 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)?
  - b. How does Paul’s theology address the Jewish-Gentile tensions especially present in the Roman church?
7. Now that you have wrestled with Romans 8, how do you read the popular verse 8:28 in its context?
8. A younger Christian asks you for advice on why she doesn’t experience the abundant life in the Spirit described in Scripture. How would you go about diagnosing this complaint?

Compare your answer to the following quote from Stott:

(If Paul) speaks in Galatians 5:22 of the harvest of the Spirit, he writes in 6:8 that we are to sow to the Spirit, and then we reap what we sow. Whether we reap the fruit of the Spirit depends on whether we sow to the Spirit. The seeds we sow to the Spirit that produce this harvest are . . . a disciplined use of the means of grace. That is, daily prayer and meditation on the Scriptures, . . . reading Christian books, making Christian friends, and getting engaged in Christian service. It is by a disciplined use of these means of grace that we grow in grace, and the Holy Spirit within us is able to produce the beauty of holiness.<sup>6</sup>

9. 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.”

obedience, the Spirit can” (*ibid.*, p. 221). Stott argues that the traditional Reformed understanding of Rom 8:4 as referring to justification rather than sanctification is wrong because it makes the final clause (“who... live... according to the Spirit”) a non-sequitur. (Also, see again Jer 31:33, Ezek 11:19-20, 36:26.)

<sup>5</sup> *God’s Empowering Presence*, p. 517.

<sup>6</sup> “The Unforbidden Fruit,” *Christianity Today*, Aug 17, 1992, p. 36.

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?<sup>7</sup>

10. 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 amazement, “Do you mean tot ell 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.<sup>8</sup>

What support do you see in Romans 8 for an approach to sanctification which relies upon what might be called a “let-go-and-let-God” attitude?



*Fun quotation #1:* “[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.)

*Fun quotation #2:* “[Paul’s] letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.” (2 Pet 3:16)

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<sup>7</sup> Before throwing up your hands and ordering Romans-3:23 bumper stickers, read the articles in *Books and Culture* by Ron Sider (Jan/Feb 2005; Jul/Aug 2007). He presents surveys showing that self-identified Christians are indistinguishable from the general population in a large number of categories including divorce, giving to the poor, sexual ethics and racism. However, the 4% of the adult population which holds a more comprehensive “biblical world view” is nine times more likely to avoid “adult-only” material on the internet; twice as likely to volunteer to help the needy; four times as likely to boycott objectionable companies, etc. As he puts it, “When we can distinguish nominal Christians from deeply committed, theologically orthodox Christians, it is clear that genuine Christianity does lead to better behavior, at least in some areas.” (For a brief digestion of these ideas and data, see *Choose Metamorphosis*, CLN, Jul 2007.)

<sup>8</sup> *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.’”