

Romans 7

Leftover question from Romans 6

1. *Slaves to righteousness*: When Paul speaks of being slaves to righteousness (6:19), and presenting our members to God as instruments of righteousness (6:13), he is painting a picture of someone whose time and attention are devoted to doing what's right.

Is this true of us? We have many responsibilities: career, family, church, etc. Each of these is necessary and good: we to work as unto the Lord (Col 3:23) in our careers; we focus on our family, which is a gift from God (Ps 127:3) and a great responsibility (Prov 22:6); and while coffee service and ushering, committee work and, well, more committee work aren't glamorous, we have a duty to serve in the church. And surely we aren't wrong to enjoy some regular rest and relaxation as a gift from God (Eccl 3:13)? And aren't we wise to exercise (1 Cor 6:19) and keep our houses in order (Prov 13:4; 6:6-12)?

The danger in being busy with all these *good* things is that we may fail to do *great* things. If all our duties leave us without time to immerse ourselves in Scripture and prayer, if we can't recall the last time we shared our faith or prayed consistently for an unbeliever, if we have stopped thinking of how we can increase our tithe, since after all we are already giving well above the average American Christian, then perhaps we should drop something good for the sake of something great.

Without giving in to guilt, indulge the following with leisurely conjecture: if you had an extra six hours each week to do as you pleased, what might you do for others in Jesus' name?

Romans 7

2. What observations did you make of Romans 7 in your multiple readings of it?
3. How did sin "deceive" Paul (v. 11)?
4. Listen to excerpts from Keller and McCallum. Both assert that the way to approach our tendency to struggle with sin is to focus on our identity in Christ, our being "under grace" and not "under the law" (6:14). See the table below comparing these two perspectives. *In your experience*, has this approach helped you be more open to the power of the Spirit to free you from sin?
5. Paul, in 7:14-25, describes an inner struggle against sin. This resonates with many Christians' experience of repeated failure to do what's right, despite all good intentions. Is Paul describing a state to be cured or is he describing a struggle by which God humbles us so we rely more fully upon him? Is Paul's struggle in this passage something a healthy Christian is *freed from*, or does this struggle position us to more fully rely upon God? (If possible, support your answer using the text.)
6. Stott writes,

The right way of applying Romans 7-8 is to recognize that some church-goers today might be termed "Old Testament Christians". The contradiction implied in this expression indicates what an anomaly they are. They show signs of new birth in their love for church and the Bible, yet their religion is law, not gospel; flesh, not Spirit; the 'oldness' of slavery to rules and regulations, not the 'newness' of freedom through Jesus Christ. They are like Lazarus when he first emerged from the tomb, alive but still bound hand and foot. They need to add to their life liberty. (210)

Choose among the following: (a) Such an animal has been rumored but never seen in the wild; (b) Our pews are packed with them; (c) They only found in those *other*, legalistic denominations; (d) We all fall into this trap from time to time; (e) Your own personal, non-lame answer: _____.

7. For Paul the law is good in that it reveals God’s character, but it also enflames our passions. At the core of our struggle with the law is fear of punishment, despite our being free from condemnation (8:1). Practically speaking, how can you apply Paul’s insights to our parenting? Should we tell our children they are dead to our rules about doing chores, not lying or cheating at school, making wise choices with their bodies, etc.? How can we give them wise boundaries without simply making them more aware of their desire to sin?



Fun fact: “Those who think that the ‘I’ of Romans 7 is an unregenerate unbeliever, who reaches the depths of wretchedness and despair in crying out for rescue, and who then immediately announce his salvation in the second cry which counters and cancels the first, find v. 25b an impossible anticlimax. **It is embarrassing to the point of being intolerable**, since it expresses a continuing slavery to the law of sin. The only way they can find to solve their problem is to **do violence to the text** (though with no manuscript support whatever) and to **change the order of the verses**, putting v. 25b *before* the cry of v. 24.” Those guilty of this include translator J. B. Phillips and interpreters C. H. Dodd and Ernst Kasemann. (Stott, 214)

Area	Under Law	Under Grace
View of self	I am regenerated, therefore I am able to keep the law; the law helps me live for God	I am regenerated but I still can’t keep the law because of the “sinful nature” (7:10) in my “inner being” (7:22), but relying on the Spirit, not the letter, I can gradually change (7:6, 4)
The “key” to spiritual growth	Self discipline (or spiritual experiences)	I know effort of will is futile (7:18; Gal 3:3) and look to a process, not to quick-fix experiences
Mental focus	On my <i>duty</i> : <u>obedience to the rules</u>	On my identity in Christ (5:11-14), on my personal relationship with God and on loving others as a means of growth
Reaction to failure	Surprised and distressed, rationalizing, minimizing and self-recrimination, vowing to do better next time	Not surprised, confident of God’s acceptance (5:6-11), I return to active dependence on God’s power
Reaction to success	Proud and intolerance of others	Humbly grateful, able to empathize with others (2:1), seeing continued need for growth
Eventual result	External conformity, but increasing internal defeat and hypocrisy, growing cynicism and despair, or self-righteous external comparisons	Gradual transformation into a person with a spiritual mind-set A more loving, Christ-like person

Leader's background

This passage outlines our relation to the law and the law's relation to sanctification. The law is good in that it reveals God's will (7:7), but it inflames our passions to be under the law, as opposed to under grace. Paul describes this effect in 14-25: you want to do what's right, you love the law, but you reliably do what's wrong instead. "with my mind I am a slave to the law of God but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin" (25b). Paul resolves this by saying that having died with Christ we are dead to the law, and are free to live "in the new life of the Spirit" (6b). Tim Keller and Dennis McCallum both point to this as being all about mindset, since in 7:4-6 Paul makes it clear the law arouses sinful passions. And elsewhere Paul says (Col 2:23) that rules forbidding certain behaviors have no power to restrain our "sensual indulgence"—what he refers to in Romans 7 as our "flesh".

Important parallel passages to Romans 7 are Galatians 5 and Colossians 2.

Some have seen the end of Romans 7 as describing a pre-Christian (e.g. Moo supports this). They point out that Paul could hardly describe himself as a slave to sin (7:14) when in previous chapters he's said he's a slave to righteousness.

There are various reasons why this is unlikely.

1. 7:22: He delights in the law, something he's said earlier in ch. 3 that unbelievers don't do
2. If this is describing an unbeliever than it's presumably culminating in his conversion. But this doesn't match with anything we know of Paul's history
3. Paul recognizes that he is unspiritual (14) and that nothing good lives in him, in his sinful nature (18). But unbelievers "are self-righteous and self-confident; only believers think and speak of themselves in self-disgust and self-despair" (Stott)
4. Paul sees the law as holy and righteous and good (12) and spiritual (14) and "the good I want to do" (19) and he delights in the law in his inner being (22) and in his mind he's a slave to the law (25). This is not the language of the unregenerate. Paul will say in ch 8 that "the sinful mind is hostile to God" and "it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so" (8:7). Paul is not rebellious against the law.
5. Paul's cry in 24 expresses desire, not despair. He wants to be rescued "out of this body of death"—i.e., out of his sinfulness. This is an example of the inward "groaning" of God's people for redemption (8:23).

All this is a picture not of an unbeliever but of a Christian, and even a mature one. Dunn suggest that what we see here is the already/not yet tension. Paul recognizes the value of the law and his bondage to sin, knows that God's freed him, but doesn't experience that freedom fully. But how can someone be both freed from sin and a slave to it? We know three things about the "I" in Romans 7:

1. He is regenerate—his mind is not hostile to God's law (8:7)
2. He is not the healthy believer described in 6:17+ because he's not freed from sin (7:14, 23)
3. He doesn't seem to know about the Holy Spirit, mentioned only in v. 6

So Romans 8 describes the normal Christian; Romans 7 describes a normal Christian who has not yet learned to rely upon the Spirit for change and freedom from sin.

So in summary, Romans 7 by itself describes the condition of struggle which Romans 8 provides the cure for. Is Romans 7 silent about this cure? Its intimations are there, mostly in a negative form, by showing how a focus on the law actually leads us to sin. As believers who know the rest of Romans and Galatians we can't help but look outside this chapter and remind ourselves of the solution, which is what the chart given in the questions (taken from Dennis McCallum's 2008 teaching) does. In short, the solution appears to be using our focus on our position in Christ to open ourselves up to the work of the Spirit. The Spirit is in us, but if we live as if he weren't, we can quench his sanctifying effects.