

THE EPISTLES TO THE ROMANS

INTRODUCTION

A. Outline of Romans

1. Introduction (1:1-17)
2. The need for God's righteousness (1:18-3:20)
3. Justification: the position of righteousness from God (3:21-5:21)
4. Sanctification: from position to practice (6:1-8:39)
 - a. Concerning Sin (6:1-23)
 - 1) Start living the way God sees you (6:1-14)
 - 2) Freed to serve (6:15-23)
 - b. Concerning the Law (7:1-25)
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 - c. Concerning the Spirit (8:1-39)

A. Notes on Romans 7:13-25

1. Grant Osborne, *There is some debate about whether verse 13 belongs with verses 7-12...or with verses 14-25. This almost always means that the verse is a transition between the two sections.* I have chosen to place it with verses 14-25 as a main point.
2. John Stott, *The law is good, but it is also weak. In itself it is holy, but it is impotent to make us holy. This important truth lies behind the whole final section of Romans 7. It depicts the hopeless struggle of people who are still 'under the law.' They are right to look to the law for moral guidance, but wrong to look to it for saving power.*

ROMANS 7:13-25, LIFE UNDER THE LAW

A. Paul's rebuttal of a false claim (13), *Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.*

1. Paul asks a rhetorical question.
 - a. He directly answers the question he asked in Romans 7:7, *What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."*
 - b. Of course, the *good* is the Law as may be determined in this verse, *Yet if it had not been for the law.*
2. He answers his question with a strong rebuttal, *By no means!*
 - a. Sin produced death in Paul by means of sin's working through the law.
 - b. The Law reveals the sinfulness of sin not that the Law is sin.
 - c. The specific commandment of covetousness which Paul used in verses 7-8 of Romans 7, shows the utter sinfulness of sin because of its misuse of something good, the Law.
 - d. Paul noted that the law is *good* in verse 12 and now in verse 13 reminds the reader that sin abused the law which is good.
 - 1) It is good in that it was given for mankind's benefit.
 - 2) Douglas Moo, ... *'Is the law sin? ... Did the law become death to me?' (7:7, 13). The first is a question about grace, whether it encourages people to sin. The second is a question about law, whether it is the origin of sin and death. So the apostle defends both grace and law against his detractors.*
 - 3) C. E. B. Cranfield, *The true conclusion to be drawn is not that the good thing is responsible for my death but that sin made use of the good thing in order to accomplish my death.*

- e. *sin might be shown to be sin...might become sinful beyond measure*
 - 1) *Sin* is revealed to be what it is, sin.
 - 2) *Sinful beyond measure* pictures sin as that which would use the good Law for its misdeeds.
 - 3) C. E. B. Cranfield, *The two final clauses are an indication that the dire results of men's encounter with the law, so far from being a proof of the triumph of sin or of the imperfection of the law, are a sign that God's purpose finally and completely to overthrow sin is being advanced.*
 - 4) William Barclay, *The very fact that it (sin) took the law and made it a point of entry for sin shows the supreme sinfulness of sin. The whole terrible process is not accidental; it is all designed to show us how awful a thing sin is, because it can take the loveliest things and corrupt them with a polluting touch.*

B. Paul's personal confessions concerning sin (14-24)

1. His first confession (14-17)

- a. The law is spiritual but he is unspiritual in bondage to sin (14), ***For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.***

- 1) Paul is speaking of Jews who have trusted Christ but have not been made aware of the Holy Spirit or are not relying on the Holy Spirit. Note discussion in Romans 7:9 and Romans 7:18-20.

2) *the law is spiritual*

- a) It came from God.

- 1] Psalm 19:7-10, *The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.*

- 2] Romans 7:22, *For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being,*

- b) It is holy, Romans 7:12, *So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.*

- c) Paul switches to first person plural *we* to draw the readers' attention to the fact that the argument includes some or many of them.

3) *I am of the flesh, sold under sin*

- a) This term is key to a proper understanding of who is being described in this section.

- b) Note Romans 6:2, *By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?*

- c) John Stott, *How can a regenerate person, who has been set free from sin (6:18, 22; 8:2), describe himself as still its slave and prisoner (7:14, 23-25)? And how can an unregenerate person, who is hostile to God's law (8:7), declare that he delights in it (7:22)?...Can we really maintain that all Christians are simultaneously 'set free from sin' and 'sold as slaves to sin'? This is not a tension, but a contradiction.*

- d) Note: I believe 7:14-25 is not Paul speaking as one who has trusted Christ but as a Jew unaware of the Holy Spirit, like Apollos, and those who were pre-Pentecost. It can be expanded today to Christians who are ignorant to the work of the Spirit or those who try to live by the Law instead of by grace. This would clear up the difficulty between Romans 7 and 8 where it is assumed that it is normal for Christians to live in Romans 7 until they can make it to Romans 8. We choose to live by the Spirit and when we don't we will experience the despair of Romans 7.

- 1] Galatians 5:16, *But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.*

- 2] Galatians 5:24-25, *And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.*

- 3] Romans 8:3-4, *For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*

- e) John Stott, *They were relying on the law, and had not yet come to terms with its weakness. In order to emphasize this, Paul identifies with that stage of his own pilgrimage. He proclaims the impotence of the law by dramatizing it in the vivid terms of personal experience. He describes what happens to anybody who tries to live according to the law instead of the gospel, according to the flesh instead of the Spirit.*

- f) William Newell, *We must constantly remember throughout this struggle that it is not a description by the apostle Paul of an experience he was having when he wrote this Epistle! but an experience of a regenerate man before he knows either about indwelling sin, or that he died to sin and to the Law which gives sin its power; and who also does not know the Holy Spirit, as an indwelling presence and power against sin.*

- b. Paul shares his struggle with sin (15-16), ***For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good.***
- 1) *I do not understand*
 - a) *Understand* has the emphasis of *desire or want*, even *detest*.
 - b) Paul's desire was not to do things which he knew were against the Law.
 - c) Was Paul making an excuse for his actions or was he attempting to live according to the Law instead of the Spirit?
 - d) John Witmer, *This does not mean Paul was avoiding personal responsibility for his actions; he was speaking of the conflict between his desires and the sin within him.*
 - 2) Paul acknowledged that he did what he didn't want to do but didn't do what he wanted to do.
 - a) Good intentions don't make up for using the wrong tool.
 - b) John Stott, *They are right to look to the law for moral guidance, but wrong to look to it for saving power.*
 - c) John Stott, *Surely this is the conflict of a regenerate person who knows, loves, chooses and longs for God's law, but finds that by himself he cannot do it. His whole being (especially his mind and will) is set upon God's law. He wants to obey it. And when he sins, it is against his reason, his desire, his consent. But the law cannot help him. Only the power of the indwelling Spirit could change things; and that will come later.*
 - 3) Despite his experiences, Paul affirms that the law is good.
 - a) Paul identifies the culprit which is not Paul's new nature or the Law but his old nature, the flesh.
 - b) John Stott, *...the 'I' which does the opposite (doing what I hate and not doing what I want) is not the real or the genuine 'I', but rather a usurper, namely 'indwelling sin' (17, 20), or sarx (flesh) (18). In other words, the law is neither responsible for our sinning, nor capable of saving us. It has been fatally weakened by the sarx (flesh).*
 - c) Paul gives detail concerning the flesh in verses 17-20.
- c. Indwelling sin instigates sinful actions (17), ***So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.***
- 1) Paul identifies the reason for his sin which is his sinful nature.
 - 2) The new *I* is described by Paul in Galatians 2:20, *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*
 - 3) As noted in verses 16, the other *I* is his sin nature which is still active.
 - a) Romans 7:18, *For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.*
 - b) Romans 7:20, *Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.*
 - 4) Thomas Constable, *It comes as a terrible discovery for a new believer, or an untaught believer, to realize that our problem with sin is complex. We are sinners not only because we commit acts of sin (ch. 3) and because, as descendants of Adam, we share guilt because of his sin (ch. 5). We are also sinners because we possess a nature that is thoroughly sinful (ch. 7). Jesus Christ paid the penalty for acts of sin, He removed the guilt of original sin, and He enables us to overcome the power of innate sin.*
 - 5) Douglas Moo, *Because of this power of "sin dwelling in me," Paul is frustrated in carrying out what he knows to be God's good will. Paul does not, then, transfer responsibility for doing wrong from the individual Jew to an outside influence; he fixes that responsibility on that power within the person which leads that person to do what is wrong.*
2. His second confession (18-20), ***For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.***
- a. Paul clearly understood that the flesh is what causes turmoil.
 - 1) He understood that he did not have the ability to overcome the flesh on his own.
 - a) Romans 8:3, *For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh,*
 - b) Romans 13:14, *But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.*

- c) Galatians 2:20, *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*
 - d) Galatians 3:3, *Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?*
 - e) Galatians 5:16, *But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.*
- 2) He states that it takes more than desire to do what he knows he should do.
- a) Paul repeats his statement of futility from Romans 7:15, *For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.*
 - b) John Stott, ... *it seems likely that the 'nothing good' of the first part of the verse alludes to his inability to turn the desire into action. It also means that everything 'good' in human beings is tainted with evil.*
- b. The turmoil is a result of the struggle between his new nature and his sin nature.
- 1) Paul acknowledged the intensity of the struggle, Romans 7:17, *So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.*
 - 2) He emphasizes throughout this section that his issue is not with the Law which is good but with the sin that dwells within him.
 - a) John Stott, *So the law is not to blame. But neither, Paul goes on, am 'I myself' responsible, the authentic 'I'. For when I do evil I do not do it voluntarily. On the contrary, I act against my better judgment, my will and my consent. It is rather the sarx, sin living in me, the false, the fallen, the counterfeit 'I'. The real I, 'I myself', is the 'I' which loves and wants the good, and hates the evil, for that is its essential orientation. Therefore the 'I' which does the opposite (doing what I hate and not doing what I want) is not the real or the genuine 'I', but rather a usurper, namely 'indwelling sin' (17, 20), or sarx (18).*
 - b) The issue of whether Paul is regenerate or not is what needs to be clarified.
- c. John Stott constructs pieces from the text which leads me to believe Paul pictures a regenerate person who loves the Law but lacks the awareness of the Holy Spirit's role in sanctification.
- 1) The person must be regenerate because he loves the Law. An unregenerate mind is hostile to God's law and refuses to submit, Romans 8:7, *For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.*
 - 2) John Stott, *Secondly, although regenerate, he is not a normal, healthy, mature believer. For believers 'used to be slaves to sin' but now 'have been set free from sin' and have become slaves of God and righteousness (6:17ff.), whereas this believer declares himself to be still the slave and the prisoner of sin (14, 23).*
 - 3) Paul describes a man who does not know about and/or has not experienced the Holy Spirit.
 - a) There is no mention of the Spirit in Romans 7:13-25.
 - b) Handley Moule spoke of the absence of the Holy Spirits in this section, *this absolute and eloquent silence.*
 - 4) John Stott, *It is Romans 8 which is full of the Spirit (mentioned twenty-one times) and which calls the indwelling of the Spirit the authenticating mark of belonging to Christ (8:9). If then we are looking for a description of the normal Christian life we will find it in Romans 8; Romans 7, with its concentration on the law and its omission of the Spirit, cannot be held to describe Christian normality... the 'I' seems to be an Old Testament believer, an Israelite who is living under the law, including even the disciples of Jesus before Pentecost and probably many Jewish Christian contemporaries of Paul.*
 - 5) Further elaboration by John Stott concerning the identity of the I, *And even after Pentecost it appears that many Jewish Christians took time to adjust to the transition from the old aeon to the new. To be sure, they loved the law, but they were also still 'under' it. Even those who had grasped that they were 'not under law but under grace' for justification had not all grasped that they should also be 'not under law but under the Spirit' for sanctification. They had not yet come out of the Old Testament into the New, or exchanged 'the old way of the written code' for 'the new way of the Spirit' (7:6).*

3. His third confession (21-24), *So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*
 - a. Paul declares that when he wants to do right evil is always nearby (21).
 - b. He inwardly delights in the law of God (22).
 - 1) Psalm 1:2, *but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.*
 - 2) 2 Corinthians 4:16, *So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.*
 - c. There is another law indwelling him which wages war against his mind and makes him captive to the law of sin (23).
 - d. Paul concludes with a cry for deliverance (24)
 - e. John Stott, ... *this is the condition of the person who is still under the law; it is the Holy Spirit who is missing.*
- C. A solution with a hopeful conclusion (25), *Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.*
 - a. Paul looked away from his condition through faith and knew there would be resolution through Jesus Christ.
 - 1) It reminds me of the cry of faith by Job in the midst of overwhelming pain, John 19:25, *For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth.*
 - 2) A person may be stuck in the mire of the present but there is hope when one looks to Jesus.
 - b. He concludes this chapter still stuck in the mire.
 - 1) He has hope because he continues to delight in serving the law of God with his mind.
 - 2) Yet, he continues to struggle with his body of flesh.
 - 3) Thankfully victory is closer than he can imagine because of Romans 8.

CONCLUSION

- Douglas Moo, ... *we are warned that the Mosaic law, and, hence, all law, is unable to deliver us from the power of sin; the multiplication of "rules" and "commands," so much a tendency in some Christian circles, will be more likely to drive us deeper into frustration than to improve the quality of our walk with Christ.*
- Warren Wiersbe, *If we depend on the energy of the flesh, we cannot serve God, please God, or do any good thing. But if we yield to the Holy Spirit, then we have the power needed to obey His will. The flesh will never serve the Law of God because the flesh is at war with God. But the Spirit can only obey the Law of God! Therefore, the secret of doing good is to yield to the Holy Spirit.*