

Teaching the Text:

- b) The Law Highlights the Internal Conflict in Believers with Indwelling Sin (7:14-25)

“A first-person story in the **present** tense (e.g. ‘I am’... ‘I do’... ‘I agree’... ‘I know’...).” ~ Christopher Ash

- (1) The divided “I”: the futility of trying to do good and the problem of sin living in me. (7:14-20)
- (2) The two laws: a summary of the conflict described in vv. 14-20 (7:21-24)
- (3) The transition statement: anticipation of Rom. 8 and the victory over sin, and a look back at Rom. 7 and the struggle with sin (7:25).

Schedule

- Jan 19 - Romans 8

Previous Lessons

- Previous lesson notes are available online:
<https://www.theheightschurchmn.org/adult-sunday-school>

Credits

- Main sources for outline and shared quotes are:
 - *Epistle to The Romans (NICNT)* by Douglas Moo [Eerdmans, 1996]
 - *Romans (IVPNTC)* by Grant Osborne [IVP, 2004]
 - *Teaching Romans, Volume One: Unlocking Romans 1-8 for the Bible Teacher* by Christopher Ash [Christian Focus, 2009]
 - “The ‘Wretched Man’ Revisited: Another Look at Romans 7:14-25”, by J.I. Packer, in *Romans and the People of God* [Eerdmans, 1999]
 - “Who Is This Divided Man? Part 1” [5/27/01] and “Who Is This Divided Man? Part 2” [6/3/01], sermons by John Piper.

III. The Assurance Provided by the Gospel: The Hope of Salvation (5:1-8:39)

B. Freedom from Bondage to Sin (6:1-23)

C. Freedom from Bondage to the Law (7:1-25)

1. The Christian’s Present Relationship with the Law – Dead to Law, Joined to Christ (7:1-6)
2. The Law’s Role in the Life of a Christian – Exposes Sin (7:7-25)
 - a) The Law Awakens Unbelievers to the Wickedness of Sin (7:7-13)

“A first-person story in the **past** tense (e.g. ‘I died’... ‘I found’... ‘sin produced [in me]’...).” ~ Christopher Ash

Discussing the Debate:

- (1) **The Big Debate:** Who is the “I” [*ego*] in Romans 7:7-25?
 - (a) Paul speaks dramatically of his past experience as an unconverted person– possibly stressing as a Jew.
 - (b) Paul speaks of his and all believers’ present experience of inner conflict with sin in their Christian life.
- (2) **The Big Picture** of Romans 1-8.
 - (a) The Law is powerless to make us righteous before God. We are sinners by nature and condemned. Our only hope for justification (being declared righteous, achieving a righteous status) is through the righteousness available to us in Christ (Rom. 4:4-5). We turn from depending on our law-keeping to trusting Christ’s law-keeping.
 - (b) With sanctification (the process of our becoming progressively more righteous in practice) we also cannot depend on the Law – we must die to it in order to bear fruit for God (Rom. 7:4).

“So [both] justification... and sanctification [are] by faith in union with Christ, and both involve turning away from the Law as “the decisive means of getting right with God and becoming like God.” ~ John Piper

- (c) This teaching brings questions about Paul’s view of the law: “Is the Law sin?” [7:7] and “Does the law cause death?” [7:13]. Paul responds in chapter 7 with an emphatic “**No!**”

(3) Considerations to Keep in Mind re: the Debate

- (a) Both interpretations can support Paul's main point – both illustrate that the problem is indwelling sin not the Law itself.
- (b) Don't build doctrine on just one text. A wider look at other Scriptures is needed for understanding the nature of the Christian life. People holding either view of Romans 7 could still agree that:
 - (i) Christians have experiences like this.
 - (ii) And much more victory over sin in the Christian life is possible than what might this text could seem to be teaching.
- (c) Building a doctrine on one text alone, can lead to wrong theology.

“Beware of people who build their views on isolated passages. That is where most cults and quirky interpretations come from.” ~ John Piper

(4) Historical Examples of this Debate

- (a) Augustine vs. Pelagius – our obedience always falls short; man does not have the power to keep God's law apart from grace.
- (b) The Reformers vs. Roman Catholicism – even the best Christians' best works include sin; there is no place for salvation-by-works.
- (c) Early Evangelicals vs. Higher Life perfectionism – there is a continued presence of indwelling sin in believers; any form of sinlessness is not possible in this life.

(5) Reasons for the Majority Reformed Position.

- (a) Explains the shift from past tense (vv. 7-13) to present tense (vv. 14-25)
- (b) Better explains the “so then” in v. 25b. In fact, many commentators try to rearrange the verse or claim that it is not genuine to Paul's book on no textual basis, just to avoid this difficulty.

“If verse 25a, Paul's thanksgiving, is held to proclaim present deliverance from whatever bondage to sin is described in verses 14-24, then the second part of the conclusion (‘with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin,’ NRSV) is a non sequitur, as well as being a shattering anticlimax that actually goes back on what has just been said.” ~ J. I. Packer

- (c) This view stays consistent with Paul's clear teaching in Rom. 8:5, 7) that “those who live according to the flesh” do not “set their minds on the things of the Spirit” and are “hostile to God” and cannot “submit to God's law”.

- (d) He “delights” in the law of God (7:22) which is the opposite of the hostility toward the law expected of unbelievers (8:7). He serves the Law of God with his mind (v. 25) which is not possible for those whose minds are set on the flesh (8:5-8).

“In his inmost being, in what is central in will and affection, he delights in the law of God.... enmity is the opposite of delight in the law.” ~ John Murray

- (e) The man in 7:14-25 “is one whose will is toward that which is good (vv. 15, 18, 19, 21)”. This contradicts Rom. 8:5-8 and 3:10-12, 18.

“The man of 7:14-25 does bad things but he hates them and they violate the prevailing bent of his will to the good. The unregenerate man hates the good; the man of 7:14-25 hates the evil.” ~ John Murray

- (f) In chapters 5-8 the subject is the Christian life.
- (g) Counter arguments are inconclusive: 1) “sold under sin” and “captive to the law of sin” seems to contradict Rom 6:14, 17-18 and “I am carnal” (KJV) or “fleshly” (NASB/LSB) or “of the flesh” (ESV/CSB) seems to define him as still “living in the flesh” (7:5) – but here Paul seems to be speaking pictorially and describing how he feels, not the objective reality; 2) seems to be too negative a picture for a believer (vv. 18 and 24) – but Paul seems to be giving the bad picture before discussing the work of the Holy Spirit in chapter 8.
- (h) The tension in this passage is explained in the “inaugurated eschatology” Paul is teaching. The old age still weighs us down and affects us; while the new age of Christ is breaking in early but not yet fully here.

“But, so long as Christians live ‘between the times’, their lives provide the battleground for the conflict summarized in Galatians 5:17, ‘the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would.’” ~ F.F. Bruce