

Romans: Verse-by-Verse

Romans 7:7

Student Notes:

- **Summarizing Romans 7:1-6:**

1. Under the New Covenant, God has given us that new Spirit he promised: God has placed his own Spirit within us. We don't relate to God on the basis of a "letter written in stone". Instead of an external code we now have an internal relationship with Christ.

2. The Moral Law of God has been transferred to our hearts, but because of the Spirit's indwelling, we have been given an inward power to keep it.

Let's read verses 7-12:

- **The Problem With "I":**

A considerable disagreement among scholars as to **whom** Paul is referring to in this passage when he uses the pronoun "I". Is Paul speaking from his Christian experience or his pre-Christian, Jewish background?

Romans 7 has created an enormous debate among exegetes and expositors as to the identity of the first person singular verbs throughout this chapter.

Four Possible Identities of the "I" in Romans 7:

1. An Autobiographical Understanding:

Some scholars consider the first person singular of the verbs in Romans

7 and Paul's uses of what is called the "personal pronoun ego", "I" as being "autobiographical."

Paul is either describing one of three circumstances: 1. His pre-Christian experience as a Jew under the Law. 2. His immediate post-conversion struggle. 3. His continuing struggle to obey the Law as a Christian.

2. The “Adam” Experience:

Some believe that the “I” in Romans 7:7-25 describes the experience of Adam and corporate solidarity with him.

- Theodoret -- early church father—“Romans 7:7-12 can be applied only to Adam.”
- Longenecker: Corporate solidarity with Adam in verses 7-13 -- “I in Adam”. Verses 14-25: The continuing effects of that solidarity-- “Adam in me.”

3. The “I” As Israel:

Chrysostom-- Early Church father -- Paul’s use of the “I” in Romans 7:7-25 as a representation of the nation of Israel and the continuing situation of the unregenerate Jews under the Law.

In this interpretation, Paul’s uses of the word “We” as the the nation of Israel. Example: “We” were spiritually ‘alive’ before the giving of the Law at Sinai. “The Law gave sin its opportunity to create transgression and so to deepen and radicalize our spiritual lostness.”

4. “Everyone And No One”:

Some theologians insist the “I” in Romans 7:7-25 is not specifically Paul or Israel – but at the same time represents everyone’s experience. In other words, Paul is using figurative language to describe the conflict between a human being and the demand of God’s Law.

Which view is correct? None of them fit perfectly. The most natural – and the most complicated view – is to see this first person pronoun to mean Paul himself.

- **Verse 7: A Starting Point:**

“What shall we say, then? Is the law sinful? Certainly not! Nevertheless, I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For I would

not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."

Paul's Prior Negative References to the Mosaic Law:

- Verse 4: "We died to the law through Christ's body in order that we might belong to him". From that, we learned that it is impossible to give our allegiance to the law and to Christ simultaneously.

- Verse 5: "The law aroused our sinful passions, so that we 'bore fruit for death'". Paul's sequence of "sin and death" statements made it clear that he believed the Mosaic Code responsible for both.

- Verse 6: "We have now been released from the law in order to serve in the newness which the Holy Spirit brings". The new, "Spirit-controlled life", only became possible when the Holy Spirit invaded our inner life.

- **Grace or Antinomianism?**

Paul is writing to Christians in an overwhelming Gentile area – Rome. A large number of his intended audience are Jewish Christians. Is this the reason that his larger sections are preceded by his anticipation of their questions and criticisms?

Note how he starts verse 7: **"What shall we say, then? Is the law sinful? Certainly not!"**

- **The Jewish Commitment To The Mosaic Law:**

The Jews had a profound commitment to the Mosaic Law – and to a works/ righteousness system in which you have strict rules by which your actions please God.

The fear of many of the Jewish Christians: Paul's approach would lead to Christians to just do whatever they want -- "The more you sin, the more grace you receive".

The Jewish understanding of the Law -- John MacArthur:

If you believe that the law procures holiness, and the law maintains holiness -- if you take away the law, you take away the rules, and you take away the standards -- you have eliminated the safeguard to holiness.

... All they can see is the whole society running amuck under this kind of grace teaching.

“Is the Law sin”? “Is the Law sinful?”

The ancient rabbis: The Mosaic code in three ways: 1. The ceremonial law. 2. The social law. 3. The moral law.

- **By the time of Christ:** The rabbis (and traditions) had summed up all of the Old Testament law into two sections of 613 commandments:

1. The mandatory things to be done: Among these 248 mandatory rules were proscriptions on behavior related to God, to the temple, sacrifices, vows, rituals, donations, Sabbaths, animals for consumption, festivals, community, idolatry, war, social issues, family, judicial matters, legal rights, and slavery.

2. The 365 prohibitions. These “do-not-rules” covered idolatry, lessons from history, blasphemy, temple worship, sacrifices, priests, diet, vows, agriculture, loans, business, slaves, justice, and relationships.

How difficult was it to keep the Mosaic Code? The Jerusalem Council met to determine how to handle one of the earliest influxes of Gentiles into the Church.

Peter's statement: “God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. **Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear?** No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.” – Acts 15:8-11

“What shall we say, then? Is the law sinful?”

Next Time: A deeper look at verse 7.