

Week Six: Romans 7:1–25

Key Verse

“But now we have been released from the law, since we have died to what held us, so that we may serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the old letter of the law.” - Romans 7:6 (CSB)

Key Principles

- We can never live up to righteous standards and fulfill the law on our own because of our sinful nature.
- Because we live unified with the risen Christ, we are able to be fruitful in good works beyond what the law could lead us to.
- In Christ, we have begun to taste the goodness of our freedom from sin, so we fight against the “law” at work in our bodies in the present, with the hope of full freedom to come.

Read

In Romans 1:18–3:20, Paul drills home the idea that everyone is unrighteous, and that unrighteousness leaves us in an all-consuming mess. His argument came to a beautiful conclusion at the end of chapter 3, where we saw that we are saved through the redemption of Jesus Christ, and God gave righteousness to us as a gift. Here in chapter 7, Paul shows us that the law cannot help us with our sin problem by itself. Paul says that he is wretched and at war within himself. This piece of the argument is not particularly encouraging at face value, but it sets up the beautiful conclusion about what life in the Spirit looks like for a Christian in Romans 8 (which we'll study next week).

But before we get to the good news, we have to hear the sobering truth of Romans 7. It's important to pay attention to verse 1 and note that Paul is talking to a group of people who know God's law inside and out. So, when Paul starts talking about the law, he's not talking over his audience's heads, he's talking straight to their hearts. The chapter starts with an analogy discussing how a spouse becomes freed from marital vows when his or her partner dies, as you would expect from any normal covenant or contract. In this case, death changes our relationship to the law.

Paul then draws the analogy to our union with Christ in Romans 7:4–6. When it comes to our relationship to the law, we are the ones that have died, so we are no longer obligated to the demands of the law. Here, the resurrection becomes a crucial part of our justification. Because we live unified with the risen Christ, we are able to be fruitful in good works beyond what the law could lead us to.

Paul made similar arguments in Chapter 6 about us being dead to sin and now Paul is saying something similar about the law. He says that the law actually stirs our sinful passions! This leads us to the first of two sets of rhetorical questions and subsequent answers in verses 7–12, and then later in verses 13–20. Is the law bad because of how it aroused sin (7:5) and led to death (7:8)? Not at all, Paul still holds the law in high esteem.

To give us a more complete biblical perspective: God's law, given to Moses and the Israelites at Mount Sinai as part of a covenant, was a gift. The law describes how the Israelites could have lived as a society in such a way that put God's glory on display. Through the law, the Israelites learned what displeased God, and they were alerted to what they needed to make sacrifices and ask forgiveness for. And even though the law is not binding on us, we can still look to the law to learn about God's character and standards. We can glean wisdom from it. It is a teacher that can help us grow. At every turn, the New Testament affirms the law as having these positive effects. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7), Jesus even explains the high standards that God's righteousness demands of our behavior.

So, why is Paul saying that the law is no longer our master or guide? First, he describes that, like many good gifts that God brings, humanity's nature did not respond rightly to the law. Human sinfulness used the law to stir up temptation and draw attention to sin. When we get entangled in sin, the forbidden fruit tastes sweeter because it is forbidden. But that is not what the law was designed to do. Second, we needed some other way to produce righteousness and fix the brokenness within each of us. Paul alludes to this in Romans 7:6, where he mentions the new way of the Spirit. In Romans 8:2–4,

Paul will explicitly say that the Spirit will enable us to accomplish what the law could not do: live a righteous life!

Paul's second question is whether this is the law's fault (7:13). Of course not. This is where Paul describes what it is like to fulfill the law when we have sinful natures. We know we want to do the right thing and we have a desire to do good, but we just can't make ourselves do the right thing! It's a constant battle. The situation sounds so dire for this person trying to live by the law (7:13–25). In Romans 7, Paul reminds us that we can never live up to righteous standards and fulfill the law as long as our sinful nature is within us. So, we need an intervention from outside ourselves. And in Romans 8, we'll see that this is where God's Spirit intervenes in the lives of those who have believed the gospel.

In the meantime, Romans 7:13–25 reminds us just how much our sinful nature holds us back from the righteousness that God created us to live in. When we become Christians and the Spirit comes into us to give us desires for right living, a war rages inside of us. Because we live in a fallen world, we must constantly fight with the power of the Spirit to put to death the sinfulness that still dwells inside of us. Paul uses the term "law" 23 times throughout this chapter, and each use almost always refers to God's commands in the Old Testament. But these last few instances in verse 23, Paul uses "law" to mean something else. He says that God's law is not the force that is controlling his inner being. Rather, it's a natural tendency ("law") toward using the members of his body for sin. In Christ, we have begun to taste the goodness of our freedom from sin, so we fight against the "law" at work in our bodies in the present, with the hope of full freedom to come. When Christ returns for us, we will be free to live God's way, in God's presence, free from our own sin and each

other's sin. For how the Spirit gives us a taste of that life now, read on in Romans 8 next week.

Study Guide

The following study questions are meant to help us wrestle with the text of Romans and see how the gospel displays God's righteousness. Set aside some time this week to meet with God and answer these questions for yourself. Complete each question before your weekly small group meeting. Then, when you gather with your small group, be prepared to discuss your answers together.



Read Romans 1:16–17 to remain focused on Paul's major points. Then, read Romans 7:1–25 in preparation for this week's study.

Highlight

1. Summarize what Paul says about the law in Romans 7:1–25. Does he always mean the same thing by the word "law"?

2. What rhetorical questions does Paul ask in this passage? What answers does he expect his readers to conclude?

3. If you were to divide up this chapter into sections, how many sections would you make? Where would you put the dividers and why?

4. How do verses 7–25 describe the law as bad? As good?

Explain

1. Why are people unable to obey the law apart from the gospel?

2. What creates the conflict within people, as Paul describes it in Romans 7:13–25?

3. After reading Romans 7:1–25, in what ways has your perspective on sin and the law changed?

Respond in Prayer

Each week of this study guide will include a recommended Scripture passage that helps us focus on the faithfulness of our great God. Set aside some time this week to read through the selected passage and use the prayer prompts below as your guide. We recommend praying through this passage on your own at home and together with your small group.

This Week's Prayer Passage: Isaiah 45:14–25

Read Isaiah 45:14–25.

Pray through the following prompts, according to the A.C.T.S. method.

- Adoration: Praise God because he was alive before creation, set creation in motion, and will be alive for all eternity (Isaiah 45:17–19). Praise the Lord because he is truthful: What he says is accurate and what he promises will come true (45:19, 23). Praise the Lord because he is the only God (45:22) and eventually, all creatures will recognize it (45:23).
- Confession: Confess to God that we act as if we do not know better than we act (Isaiah 45:20). Confess to God that he is righteous but we are not (45:23–24). Ask for God's forgiveness for how we have angered him and for how we have been unjustly angry against him (45:24). Ask God's forgiveness for praying and worshipping gods that cannot save us (45:20)
- Thanksgiving: Thank God for bringing an eternal salvation to his people (Isaiah 45:17). Thank God that he has called us to himself and that he has

delivered on his promise to save his people (45:19). Thank God for justifying us and for giving us himself to glory in (45:25).

- Supplication: Ask God to help you in your efforts to help the gospel advance to the nations (Isaiah 45:22). Ask God for the privilege and joy of seeing others come to faith and join the family of God (45:22). Ask God to raise up the weak and humble those who are using their power against God's purposes (45:14). Ask God to save your One and ask him for the opportunity to share about his salvation in your life.

who's your **1**ONE?

Who's Your One? is about each of us leading one non-Christian to faith in Christ this year. Read back through your notes from this week's study on Romans 7:1–25. How would you share the truths of Romans 7:1–25 with someone who is not a Christian? What words and phrases would you use?

This week, pray for your One. Update your small group's prayer journal with specific prayer points and look for opportunities to build friendships, initiate to the spiritual, share the gospel, and help them make a decision.