

hope



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Personal Preparation

Week 1 - Romans 7 - The old way

Paul has just spent Romans 6 telling us that we are no longer bound by sin, but slaves to righteousness because Christ nailed our sinful nature to the cross when he died, and we've been resurrected with him. So we are no longer under the law, but under grace (Romans 6:14). Now Paul's going to illustrate the difference.

Day 1 - Read Romans 7:1-6

Consider

- Who does Paul identify his audience as in this chapter?
- What's the point of Paul's marriage illustration in verses 2-3?
- How does that illustration relate to the Christian life in verses 4-6?

Reflect

- How have Christians died? What difference does Paul say this should make?
- Verse 6 is the key to this chapter. How so?

Pray

- That we understand the implications of dying with Christ to sin.
- That we would have confidence in the serving God in the new way of the Spirit.

Day 2 - Romans 7 - Read Romans 7:7-25 (Tangent)

This is a difficult chapter. Partly because what we read resonates with our experience - it's hard to live the Christian life. But also because Paul doesn't make absolutely clear who the 'I' is in this chapter - so we're left to make an educated guess. So we're going to look at three options in this tangent.

Option 1 - 'I' is Paul

- What in the chapter fits well with this reading?
- What's in the chapter doesn't fit well with this reading?
- If this was speaking about Paul, would this be before coming to Christ, or before (consider Romans 6 and 7:6).

Option 2 - 'I' is Adam

This interpretation might feel like it's a little bit out of left field, but while doesn't quote from Genesis 2-3, there are some strong allusions and many argue that what's in verses 7-12 could only apply to Adam.

- Read Genesis 2:15-17 and try to explain Romans 7:7-12 with what we see here in Adam.
- Do you find this argument convincing?

Option 3 - 'I' is Israel

This interpretation is all about corporate identity. In the western world, we think individualistically. Jews didn't. In fact, at the passover ritual each year, each Jew would confess that he or she was a slave in Egypt and was redeemed through the events of the Passover. Let's see how this idea might fit into Romans 7.

- When did Israel receive the Law¹? (See Exodus 20)

¹ As a general rule, when Paul uses the word Law in Romans, he's talking about the first 5 books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers & Deuteronomy), called the Pentateuch or Mosaic Law.

- How might this idea fit with Romans 7:7-12?
- How does the idea of Israel being 'I' fit with Romans 7?

If you haven't already noticed, there's no easy answer to this question. It's a confusing passage, but it's worth spending time thinking over. As we'll hopefully see as we explore it more, while there is certainly some sort of autobiographical element to Romans 7, to think that Romans 7 describes Paul's life now just doesn't seem to fit with the rest of Romans. In the next Personal Prep we'll have a look at how Romans 7 actually helps us.

Day 3 - Read Romans 7

Consider

- What's the relationship Paul describes between the law, the sinful nature and death?
- Paul asks two questions - v.7 & v.13. What's his answer to them both?

Reflect

- Describe the struggle Paul outlines in Romans 7, in your own words.
- How is our understanding of this chapter affected by Paul's comment in 6:14 that we aren't under law anymore, but under grace?
- Why does Paul finish what seems like a depressing chapter with praise to God? (v.25)

Pray

- That we would understand that in Christians there is another law at work that isn't the law of 'sin'.
- Give thanks for God's Spirit that inclines us towards God instead of away from Him.

Week 2 - Romans 8:1-17 - A New Spirit

Day 1 - Read Romans 8:1-11

Consider

- Why is there no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus? (Verses 1-2)
- How did God achieve this? (Verses 3-4)
- What are the differences between those controlled by the sinful nature and those controlled by the Spirit?
- How do you know whether you're one or the other? (Verses 8-11)

Reflect

- Do you feel confident of where you stand before God? Why?
- Considering what Paul has said already in Romans, should your confidence in where you stand before God be based on how you live your life? How does that fit in?

Pray

- That we might rejoice in the confidence we can have before God because of Jesus.
- That we might be controlled by God's Spirit and not our sinful nature.

Day 2 - Read Romans 8:12-17

Consider

- What's the connection between who Christians have been made, and how they should behave?
- Why is Paul confident Christians can live up to this status?
- What is the end point for those who Paul describes here?

Reflect

- Do you see your relationship with God in the same intimate way that Paul describes for all Christians here?
- If you're a Christian, what responsibilities do you see for yourself as a child of God?

Pray

- Give thanks that God has done more than just saved us, but given us His Spirit and made us His children as well.
- Pray that we would reflect our Father in Heaven in our lives on earth.

Week 3 - Romans 8:18-39 - Future Glory

Day 1 - Read Romans 8:18-27

Consider

- What puts a Christians suffering in this world in perspective?
- What is creation waiting for? (Verses 18-25)
- List all the ways that Paul describes Christians in verses 22-25.
- What is that helps us as we wait patiently for these things to be fulfilled? (Verses 26-27)

Reflect

- Do you see your life now in the light of future glory? What would that look like?
- When was the last time you considered the role of God's Spirit in your life?

Pray

- Giving thanks that God is redeeming creation, and us amongst it, through Jesus.
- Give thanks that God has given us His Spirit to help us wait patiently now for our future glory.

Day 2 - Read Romans 8:28-30

Consider

- Who does God work for the good of? (v.28)
- What is God's end goal for His people? (v.29)
- What is the pattern those who are predestined will follow? (v.30)

Reflect

- What comfort should Christians find in these verses?
- What is Paul saying when he calls Jesus the 'firstborn among many brothers'?

Pray

- That we would take heart in the fact that God is working for the good of His people, even when we don't see it.
- That we might reflect more and more each day who God is making us into, and less what we were.

Day 3 - Read Romans 8:31-39

This is an amazing conclusion to the first half of Romans. Paul ends with a series of probing questions, and incredible answers. Today, read through the passage, write the questions Paul asks on the left hand side of the space, and his answers on the right hand side. Then spend some time thinking through their implications.



Study 1 - Romans 7 - The Old Way

To start: What is your experience of the Christian life - or alternatively, what is your experience of Christians? Are they perfect? Better than others? More Godly?

One of the struggles with reading passages such as this one is that it resonates with our experience - it's hard to live the way God wants. But while that may be true, that's not Paul's main point in this passage. Let's spend some time unpacking what his argument is in the context of the whole of Romans.

Read Romans 7

Main Discussion	If you get stuck
<p>Explain Paul's marriage illustration in the first 6 verses.</p>	<p>How does this illustration relate to Romans 6?</p> <p>If a marriage covenant illustrates our old life and our new, what would adultery look like?</p> <p>How could Verse 6 be central to understanding these verses and what comes afterwards?</p>
<p>Keeping in mind the things raised in the personal preparation, discuss who and what Paul is talking about in verses 7-24.</p>	<p>Briefly review the Personal Preparation 2 if needed.</p> <p>How does Romans 6:14 & 8:2 affect our reading of this passage?</p> <p>If it's not autobiographical for Paul, what could be describing?</p>
<p>What's the relationship between sin, the law and death according to Paul? What's the alternative?</p>	<p>Where does sin "exist"?</p> <p>How does the law interact with sin?</p> <p>How does the grace of God short-circuit this progression?</p>

Bringing It Home:

Taking into consideration where you stand with God, what does this passage have to say about your life?

Why at the end of this passage does Paul celebrate? (v.25) Is your life and status under grace something you can praise God for? Do you?

OPTIONAL: How much do we let our experience inform our theology and vice-versa?

Study 2 - Romans 8:1-17 - A New Spirit

If Romans 7 describes those who are under law, and the effect of that upon their lives and future, Romans 8 describes the effects of grace upon Christians lives and future. It's a great finale to the first half of the letter to the Romans.

To start: Can there be assurance when humans deal with God? Why or why not?

Read Romans 8:1-17

Main Discussion	If you get stuck
<p>In these verses, what role does the Spirit play in life, assurance and eternity?</p>	<p>How does verse 2 contrast the work of the Spirit with the work of sin/death?</p> <p>Why is it that having the Spirit obliges us to live in a certain way? What way is that?</p> <p>What does it look like for the Spirit to "testify" for us? (v.16)</p>
<p>What is the contrast between those who are controlled by the Spirit and those who are controlled by nature?</p>	<p>Why does Paul make so much of the 'mind' in verses 5-7?</p> <p>What does it mean for the righteous requirements of the law to be met in Christians? (v.3-4)</p> <p>Do you think it's always obvious that you're controlled by these things?</p>
<p>What's the connection between having the Spirit and our relationship with God?</p>	<p>Describe what it would look to be adopted by God as His children? (v.15-16)</p> <p>What are the implications of being God's heirs? (v.17)</p> <p>Is there a connection between our behaviour and our standing with God?</p>

Bringing it home:

Would you describe your relationship with God as distant or intimate / an employer or a Father? Why?

What does it look/feel like to live a life without condemnation (v.1)?

What do your life and actions tell you, you have an obligation to (v.14)? (Money, comfort, praise from others, godliness?)

Study 3 - Romans 8:18-39 - Future Glory

For Christians, this is one of the most comforting and hope-filled passages in the Bible. It's the culmination of Paul's argument in the first 8 chapters of Romans - from mankind's depressing start steeped in sin, to the glory and hope of being adopted as children of God.

To Start: Why is it hard to have hope in suffering and hard times? Describe some of your own experience in this.

Read Romans 8:18-39

Main Discussion	If you get stuck
<p>What is the connection between suffering, the Spirit, hope and future glory in verses 18-27?</p>	<p>What is creation waiting for and what does this mean?</p> <p>What role does, and will, the Spirit play in a Christian?</p> <p>What does Christian hope look like?</p>
<p>How is God at work in the world and His people according to verses 28-30?</p>	<p>What implications does verse 28 have for those who know God and those who don't?</p> <p>What goal does God have for His children?</p> <p>Explain the logic within verse 30.</p>
<p>Work through the comfort that you find in Paul's finale in verses 31-39.</p>	<p>What elements of Romans 5-8 do you see Paul summarise here?</p> <p>What do you think Paul hopes to achieve by this ending to the first half of his letter? Does it?</p> <p>Why are Christians "more than conquerors" (v.37)</p>

Bringing it home:

How do you view suffering in your own life, and how do you cope with it? What would God say to you?

Do you see evidence of God's Spirit at work in your life, or in other people's lives? Why/why not?

If God's goal for His people is to make them like Jesus (v.29), do you have the same goal?

Pray & give thanks for the comfort and hope that we read about in this chapter.