

A Study in Romans 7: Part I & II

The controversy regarding the meaning of *Romans 7* centers around one issue: *is this describing a Christian experience or not*. This is the question we must answer if we are to find the accurate interpretation. Of course, the popular view is that *Romans 7* represents a converted experience however, I propose this view is neither orthodox or consistent with sound exegesis, but rather is a Calvinist, and more specifically Antinomian, interpretation. Typically, everyone has a justification for their *sin*, but some are more creative than others. Sadly, the excuses that are most alarming are the *theological excuses*. It's amazing that men actually have the audacity to use the *Holy Bible*, inspired by a *Holy God*, to try and justify *unholiness*. *Romans 7, as interpreted by many in the modern church*, is a Scriptural stronghold for those who attempt to excuse their sin with Holy writ. Surprisingly, men will irrationally hold to their interpretation of this passage while ignoring the entire body of Scripture.

In the *book of Isaiah* the prophet identifies the root problem of humanity:

Isaiah 59:1-3 *Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness.*

And in the first chapter, of the first book of the N.T., in the *Gospel of Matthew* we have God's answer to the sin problem revealed:

Matthew 1:21 *And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.*

This shows us the aim of the gospel: *to separate men from what separates them from God, SIN.*

2 Cor. 5:18 *And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ...*

Reconciliation: {Greek} *kat-al-las'-so*, To compound a change or difference.[1]

Simply stated, *where there is no change there has been no reconciliation*. Now, to *ignore, deny, or resist* the gospel truth of **freedom from sin** is to array oneself against the person of God.

1 Thes. 4:7-8 *For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit.*

Adam Clarke well says: "To plead for the continuance of sin in the heart through life is UNGRATEFUL, WICKED, and even BLASPHEMOUS; for, as he who says he has not sinned makes God a liar, so he that says the blood of Christ either cannot or will not cleanse us from all sin in this life, GIVES ALSO THE LIE TO HIS MAKER." [2]

Now the popular interpretation of *Romans 7* can best be summarized by citing verse...

Romans 7:15 *For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.*

The obvious truth communicated: *The Romans 7 man's experience renders him incapable of obedience.*

Again, the question for us to answer is does this describe Biblical Christianity?

Now, there are two basic and fundamental rules for sound Bible interpretation set forth in the Bible.

1 Cor. 2:12-13 *Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. 13Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.*

2 Tim. 2:15 *Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*

Thus, our interpretation must be first, consistent with the entirety of the Bible, and secondly, we must be careful not to rend verses out of their surrounding context. Hence, we will answer our question by these two methods: [1] *Scriptural comparison*, and [2] *expository examination*. In this first study, without ever really addressing the chapter itself, we're going to apply our first test: *Scriptural comparison*. Of course, we do not believe that *Romans 7* is a Christian testimony and cite the following reasons to explain why.

I. IT OPPOSES THE BIBLICAL DEFINITION OF A CHRISTIAN

Titus 2:11-15 *For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.*

At the heart of the new covenant is *grace* and the nature of *grace* delivers from the power of sin. *Romans 7* uses the term *sold under sin* while Paul writes in *Titus* that Jesus *redeemed, ransomed* the Christian from *all sin*. As clearly expressed, this is not merely a legal state, but a literal deliverance. The pseudo-definition of *grace* leaves us with the impression that we are destined to fail but God's *grace* overlooks, ignores, or excuses sin. However, throughout the N.T. *grace* is associated with overcoming, victory, and holiness.

Grace: {Greek} *khar'-ece*, The divine influence upon the heart, and its reflection in the life.[3]

Jesus was described as having the *grace of God*.

Luke 2:40 *And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.*

Who would be so bold as to suggest that *Jesus* lived a life of defeat?

The grace of God was upon the *Apostle Paul*...

1 Cor. 15:10 *But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.*

Was the ministry of *Paul* one of defeat? *Peter* spoke of the true grace of God.

1 Peter 5:12 *...I have written briefly, exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand.*

What about *Peter*, did he fulfill God's will or did he fail? Interestingly, the common theme of *1 Peter* is *holiness*. The modern view of Christianity suggest that grace is provided so we can *fall* but the Bible teaches it is given that we might *stand*.

Now, the Bible teaches that *grace* cannot be realized but through faith.

Ephes. 2:8 *For by grace are ye saved [saved from what?] through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God...*

And Biblical faith operates on the principal of divine love.

Galatians 5:6 *...but faith which worketh by love.*

And love is obedient and cannot sin.

Romans 13:10 *Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.*

1 John 5:3 *For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.*

A people who are truly under the covenant of grace are described in the Bible as holy.

1 Peter 2:9 *But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light...*

Chosen, holy, peculiar [set apart, separate, noticeable difference], *shewing forth, called out of darkness into his light*.

Let us consider one of the basic commands in the N.T. for holiness in the lives of Christians.

Romans 12:1 *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.*

Few will deny that God has called us to *holiness*, however, many have redefined the term.

Holiness: {Greek} *hag'-ee-os*, Purity, morally blameless, or saint.[4]

The same Greek word used in *Romans 12:1* is used throughout the N.T. in the proper name of the Spirit of God: *Holy Ghost*. The same Greek word used in *Romans 12:1* is used to describe the very character of God.

Luke 4:34 *Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God.*

John 17:11 *And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.*

Acts 3:14 *But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you...*

Numerous times this same Greek word is translated into the English word *saints* irrefutably describing the nature of the church. Therefore, we can conclude that if the church is not called to be *sin free* then God Himself cannot be described as *sin free*.

Hebrews 12:14 *Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord...*

II. IT IS AN OBVIOUS CONTRAST WITH ROMANS 6 & 8

The spirit and teaching of both *Romans 6 & 8* both contradict *Romans 7* as a Christian experience. I will simply cite two passages from each chapter to prove this point.

Romans 6:14 *For sin shall not have dominion [Lordship] over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.*

Romans 8:3-6 *For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.*

Here, *Romans 6* teaches the Christian, by virtue of the finished work of Christ, masters sin. And, *Romans 8* teaches that the Christian fulfills the law of God by walking in the Spirit. However, our so-called Christian in *Romans 7* says...

Romans 7:14-15 *For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. 15For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.*

The contradiction: If *Romans 7* is indeed a Christian experience it appears that sin obviously has the dominion and death reigns.

"The theory that this is the experience of all Christians has most pitifully and most shamefully not only lowered the standard of Christianity but destroyed its influence and disgraced its character. If this were indeed the Christian experience it would do nothing but demonstrate the insufficiency of the gospel as well as the law." -Adam Clarke[5]

III. IT CONTRADICTS WHAT PAUL HAS SAID ABOUT HIMSELF ELSEWHERE UNDER DIVINE INSPIRATION.

2 Cor. 7:2 *Receive us; we have wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man.*

1 Thes. 2:10 *Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe...*

2 Thes. 3:7 *For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you...*

According to the testimony of Scripture *Paul*, the inspired vessel, was a portrait of divine grace and victory.

1 Cor. 15:9-10 *For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.*

In other words, if *Romans 7* accurately communicates *Paul's* experience as a Christian, then other statements create a contradiction. Incidentally, each divine utterance mentioned above was penned before *Romans 7* was written (*Romans* was written in approximately A.D. 57, while *2 Corinthians* was written in A.D. 55 or 56, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* in A.D. 51 & 52). Not to mention *Paul's* own testimony before *Felix*...

Acts 24:16 *And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.*

My point is this, at the time of writing *Romans 7* *Paul* had already made many statements of victory over sin by divine inspiration. *Paul* is a *model* for us to look to...

1 Tim. 1:12-16 *And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our*

Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.

Pattern: A type for imitation; a model to be emulated and replicated.

Consider these statements by *Paul*...

"For me to live is Christ"

"Christ liveth in me"

"Follow me as I follow Christ"

Paul was saying that his life was a pure reflection of Christ and His salvation. Therefore we can conclude that if the *Apostle Paul's* Christian testimony is recorded in *Romans 7*, then this terrible struggle is a reflection of the full and unhindered grace of God upon a man. However, *Paul* said in...

Galatians 2:21 *I do not frustrate the grace of God...*

Furthermore we conclude that *Jesus Christ* was the minister of this wretched life. And finally, that this is the highest attainment of spirituality as a Christian. We know this, according to Scripture cannot be true. *Romans 7* is not the testimony of *Paul the Christian* but of *Saul the Pharisee* under the conviction of sin. It is the testimony of a carnal man sold under sin rather than that of a spiritual man redeemed by Christ. The purpose of *Romans 7* is to show the function of the law and the experience of a awakened sinner by that law.

Romans 7:12 *Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.*

And this interpretation is in accordance with Bible theology.

Psalms 19:7-9 *The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul...*

1 Tim. 1:8 *But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully...*

The obstacle to understanding *Romans 7* is a moral one, rather than an intellectual one. God reveals nothing to the careless and casual inquirer or those who tend to use Scripture to justify their sin and lukewarmness.

2 Thes. 2:10-11 *And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie...*

[1] *Strong's Hebrew & Greek Dictionary.*

[2] *Adam Clarke's Commentary.*

[3] *Strong's Hebrew & Greek Dictionary.*

[4] *Strong's Hebrew & Greek Dictionary.*

[5] *Adam Clarke's Commentary.*

PART II

As I mentioned in "Part I: A Study in Romans 7", our task in studying *Romans 7* is to decide if the experience set forth is one of a Christian or not. Remember, we discussed the two basic and fundamental rules for sound Bible interpretation according to *1 Cor. 2:13* and *2 Tim. 2:15*.

1 Cor. 2:13 ...comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

2 Tim. 2:15 ...rightly dividing the word of truth.

So, we set forth to answer our question by these two methods: [1] *Scriptural comparison*, (which we did Sunday) and [2] *expository examination*. In Part two of our study, we will simply go directly through the chapter verse by verse and expound as we go. This is in no way exhaustive but will provide a concise overview of the entire chapter. As I've stated, we believe that this experience presented in *Romans 7* is a legal experience and not one of a man under grace. He is still the servant of sin, only now **unwilling**. Many claim to be under grace but they are deceived.

Romans 6:14 "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace."

Interestingly, for those who claim that this man in *Romans 7* is under grace consider the following:

- The *law* is mentioned 23 times, more than any other chapter in the Bible with the exception of *Psalms 119*.
- *Jesus* is only mentioned twice while *grace* is never mentioned.
- Yet there are 52 references to first person - *I, me, and my*.

The Introduction:

Romans 7:1-4 *Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man. Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.*

In verse 1 we have the introduction and premise...*The law has dominion over those who are alive.* This is not speaking of physical life, but rather, of those who are alive to the old man/flesh - *in covenant with.* God will not forgive the old man, nor can the blood cleanse the old man (flesh). The old man can not be justified, only crucified. Hence, deliverance is through death alone. The Apostle draws a parallel between the marriage covenant and our spiritual covenant. So, we are either in covenant with Jesus and *under grace*, or in covenant with the old man and therefore *under the law*. The only way to be freed from the covenant is through death. Those who are under grace are now dead to the *old* and alive to the *new*.

Next, life past and present...

Romans 7:5-6 *For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. 6But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.*

The Apostles clearly offers our past and present conditions as once dead in sins and now, as Christians, alive through Christ Jesus. These verses are the introduction to the struggle of *Romans 7*. Teaching that the strength of *sin* is the *law*.

And the *law* only has dominion if the criminal of the *flesh* is *alive*.

The Vindication and purpose of the law:

Romans 7:7 *What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.*

All the blame for our sinful condition and rebellious constitution is our responsibility alone. There is nothing wrong with the law - *Paul addresses this because it most certainly was an issue.* The problem is unregenerated man. We do not *make void* or *do away with the law* but we must do away with ourselves. Sadly, much of today's theology, instead of embracing the cross and agreeing with the penalty of the law, has attacked the standard instead. At its core this is a crossless and rebellious gospel (and the fruit of a crossless gospel are those who identify with *Romans 7*).

Philip. 3:18-19 (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.)

The law is what brings the knowledge of sin to awaken a careless sinner. **Romans 3:20** ...for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

Galatians 3:24 Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

The awakened sinner battles with sin apart from grace, this is what we see in *Romans 7*.

Sin resists the law.

Romans 7:8-13 But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me. Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.

Sin is exposed for what it is by the pure law of God. Here we have a man who is now awakened to his sin but still lost, he is under law (sees the standard) but has no grace to fulfill. "What about present tense language of the passage?" some may ask. One the main objections to *Roman 7's* being a legal experience is the *present tense*. However, there is a common verb tense called the *Historical Present Tense* and this is part of our, every-day ordinary speech. In the textbook *Essentials Of English Grammar* by L. Sue Baugh, you will find that...

"...writers occasionally use the present tense when reviewing the contents of a book or describing past events to bring them vividly to life for the reader."

This form of the *present tense* is known as the *literary* or *historical present*. In general, the *Historical Present Tense* in a passage (1) starts in the past tense to establish its form; (2) the writer then uses the present tense to bring a vivid description of an event. For example:

"I was an atheist when I was 20 [past tense]. A neighbor came to me one day to tell me about Jesus... But I don't want to hear it! [present tense] I am an atheist! I don't believe in God!"

Paul, in *Romans 7*, follows the same format. *Romans 7:9-11* uses the past tense first. Paul writes *Romans 7* in the *Historical Present Tense* to give hypocrites a chance to closely identify with his struggle with sin prior to conversion. If you, my friend, can identify with this passage, let it be known: you are not a Christian.

The Spirit of the law.

Romans 7:14-17 *For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.*

Carnal = Animal, Unregenerate.

Sold = Into slavery.

Under = Beneath or in Subjection to.

More than any other words in *Romans 7*, these clearly point to a pre-conversion period under the law. Paul is not demonstrating the insufficiency of the *gospel of grace*, but rather, the insufficiency of the *law* to redeem us apart from *grace*. As we have already seen, this cannot be Paul's Christian testimony. Notice, that we now see the terrible struggle of an awakened sinner seeking to obey the law in his own strength.**Romans 7:15** *For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.*

Notice the agony and despair of this man as he seeks freedom. Thus, this is really not the condition of most who claim this experience as they generally are content to remain frustrated and bound. We have seen what the law does and now we will see what it can not do.**Romans 7:17** *Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.*

This man says ...*"Not I but sin"*

But Paul said...*"Not I but Christ."*

The word *Dwell* speaks of a fixed and permanent resident. It is not to stop by for a visit but to reign and have dominion.

Ephes. 3:17 *That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith;" is the aim of Christianity*

Galatians 2:20 *"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."*

Wishful thinking.

Romans 7:18-23 *For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.*

We see here a form with no power. *Grace* is not just to know, but the ability to *know* and *do*. **James 1:22** *But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.*

Philip. 2:13 *For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.*

With his intellect this man agrees with the law but was still captive to sin. Many think that because they are remorseful over sin that they are born-again. The most depraved people will praise virtue and justice in the abstract (*Isaiah 58* "Take delight in approaching unto God"). Herod heard *John the Baptist* with delight. We must never confuse *noble desires* with *noble character*. There is a great difference in *admiring* and *possessing*. Here we have a man convinced by the law but not yet changed by the gospel. He said he was brought into captivity. This man was a captive to sin not just falling here and there.

2 Cor. 3:17 *Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty....(not captivity)*

If there is no liberty from sin then you are not filled with the life or Spirit of God.

Romans 8:9-10 *But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.*

The desperate cry.

Romans 7:24-25 *O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.*

What God will accept we can not produce. The conviction of the Holy Ghost, using the law of God is what brings a man to this realization. Unlike many today who claim this experience, this man cried out for deliverance. The law has done its work, as a schoolmaster it leads a sinner to Christ. Notice, through much toil and pain did the sinner come to realize the grace of God (*conviction is a very pressing and probing experience*).

So, a verse by verse commentary, or studying God's Word in context, irrefutably proves Romans 7 represents a man under the law, not grace.

-Britt Williams