

The book of Romans is laid out perfectly, which is not surprising considering The Author, who always does everything just right (Mk. 7:37).

Romans 1 deals with the perversity of sin. Romans 2-3:18 deals with the pervasiveness of sin. Romans 3:18-5:21 deals with the penalty of sin. Romans 6 deals a deathblow to the power of sin and now we see in Romans 7 Paul deals with the questions of preoccupations with sin.

Romans 7:1 The brothers Paul is referring to are his Jewish brothers, the people of Israel.

Romans 7:1-2 According to the Law, a husband could divorce his wife, but a wife could never divorce her husband, Paul uses the analogy to say, 'You were married to the Law and there's no way you could get away from it.'

Romans 7:2-3 If only the Law would die, we would be free from its hold on us. But the Law is in excellent health (see Matt. 5:18) This husband is not about to die.

Romans 7:3-4 This is so wonderful! You have become dead to the Law. That's the key. You'll never see a dead body in a courtroom trial because when a person is dead, he's no longer under the authority of the Law. So too, because you died in Christ (Gal. 2:20) you are free from legalism. Thus, there is no reason to be preoccupied with your failing, your lack of prayer, your lack of love, your lack of anything. There is no reason to try to live up to the rules, regulations and expectations you've put upon yourself. When you realize that you died with Christ positionally on Calvary, you're free from the demands of the Law and free instead to just love the Lord.

Romans 7:4 Churches grow whenever believers become excited about their relationship with Jesus because the Christian who finally throws off the yoke of legalism inevitably become fruitful.

Romans 7:5-6 'Newness of spirit' speaks of the New Covenant, of an entirely new way of living (Jeremiah 31, Ex. 36) 'No longer will I give you tablet of stone,' the Lord declares in the New Covenant, 'but I will write My will upon the tablet of your heart. Every day will be an adventure. Some days I might awaken you at 4:30 to seek My face and to pray, while other times, I might tell you to sleep in.' That's the way Christianity was meant to be. But what have we done? We have constructed legalistic systems and expectations both personally and corporately. Folks, we were meant to live in a newness of the Spirit, moment by moment obeying and yielding and wondering, 'Lord, what next?' Throw off the yoke of legalism. Walk in the Spirit. Respond to His direction-and I guarantee you will find yourselves on the adventure of a lifetime.

Romans 7:7 What was Paul lusting after? I suggest the object of Paul's desire was not the sensual type of sin we usually associate with lust. No I believe Paul was lusting after prestige. He wanted to excel as a scholar - which seems a noble goal. Yet as he studied the Law, he saw that the underlying reason for this pursuit was a hunger for prominence. He wanted people to know how brilliant he was, how holy, how spiritual.

Romans 7:8-10 The more Paul studied the Law, the more he realized how far he was from the Law. Paul thought all he had to do was study the Law, but the more he did, the more he realized how far he was from true spirituality.

Romans 7:11-13 Whenever I see a Pharisaical tendency either in myself or another, I know it is indicative of one who has not been immersing himself in the Word. You see, if we're truly spending time in the presence of the Lord, we'll find ourselves saying just what Isaiah said. After spending the first five

chapter of his book pronouncing woe on peoples and nations, in Chapter 6, he saw the Lord and said, 'Woe is me', for in the presence of the Lord he realized he was no better than those he was indicting. A life lived in God's presence excludes judgment of others. 'I'm lusting; I'm coveting,' said Paul. But he didn't realize it until he spent time in the Scriptures and saw that he was a sinner. Now this was all pre-conversion, folks. As evidenced by the use of the past tense. Paul was looking back. But as Chapter 7 unfolds, we see that even after he was saved, he still struggled.

Romans 7:14 As outlined in 1 Cor. 2-3 there are basically 3 types of people: the "**natural man**", who is **unconverted**; the "**spiritual man**", who **walks in the Spirit**; and the "carnal man", who is born again, but lives in the energy of his flesh. We tend to think the carnal man is living for his flesh – doing worldly things. But it's much more than that. The carnal man not only lives for his flesh, but in the power of his flesh. Thus, although he can appear to be saintly and righteous, the carnal man is miserable internally because he knows he can't live up to the rules, regulations, and expectations he has placed upon himself. That's where Paul was. Yes, he was converted, but he was miserable in his carnality.

Romans 7:15 'I want to do what's right,' said Paul, 'but I end up doing the things I hate.' Ever feel that way, dieters as well as those with other struggles? 'Oh, I really want victory, I'm determined. But what I want to do, I don't do. And what I hate, I end up doing.'

Romans 7:16-17 'The problem isn't with the Law,' said Paul. 'The problem is with the sin in me.'

Romans 7:18 Whenever I'm disappointed in myself, it's because I'm **denying** what God said when He said to us, "In you dwells no good thing.' We all still battle with this. We may understand the concept theologically and maybe we can quote the verse from memory, but sometimes don't we think, "Hey, there's some good in me – isn't there? Am I really this bad, Lord Jesus? Every time I get down on myself, I hear His voice again say to me, 'Didn't I tell you straight out, didn't I record it in black and white that **in your flesh**, in your personality dwells no good thing? Why, then, are you disappointed in yourself?' I came across this interesting statistic; 75% of all people who attempt suicide describe themselves as perfectionists. This means that those who have a tendency to despair of life do so because they think there's something good in them that they're failing to utilize. They're not living up to their self-image. We teach our kids self-esteem, yet the Scriptures say, 'Sorry. In you dwells no good thing.' Far from depressing me, I am incredibly free when I finally understand this.

Romans 7:18-19 'No matter which way I turn I can't make myself do right, my performance does not measure up', ever feel that way? Can you relate to Paul in his carnal state? I can!

Romans 7:20 Here's how to differentiate between a "pig" and a "prodigal", between an "unbeliever" and a "carnal Christian"; Take the pig out of the pigpen, wash him in bubble bath, spray him with cologne, put a ribbon in his hair, and a bow on his tail, and watch what happens the first time he sees some mud. The pig will wallow in it with joy. The prodigal, on the other hand – although he might foolishly find himself in the mud from time to time - will not be comfortable there. Eventually, he'll come to his senses and say, 'Get me out of her. I hate this stuff.' – which is exactly what Paul was saying.

Romans 7:21-23 In my mind I want to follow the Law of God. I want to walk in His ways and keep His commandments. That's truly my determination, my mindset. But my body rebels. My eyes are prone towards lusting. My ears strain to hear something juicy. My tongue wags oh, so readily to gossip. There's a war going on. How can I get victory?

Romans 7:23-24 When Paul was a natural man, the Law slew him. When he became a believer, he found himself once again under legalism, with a war going on inside of him. The original Translation of the last phrase of this verse sums up Paul's state powerfully: 'O wretched man that I am' or 'O what a miserable person that am'...that's how we feel.

Romans 7:24 In Paul's day, the man convicted of first-degree murder was sentenced to be tied to the body of his victim. Often, the stench alone would kill the murderer. It is probably this Roman practice to which Paul is referring when he cries, 'Who will free me from the failures, shortcomings, and sinful tendencies I'm forced to drag behind me wherever I go?'

Paul is now ready to lead us into an explosively liberating truth. In verse 18, he said, 'How can I get victory?' After struggling a little longer, he realizes it's not 'how'. It's 'who'. And he's only a verse or two away from the most exciting part of Romans because he's no longer looking for how. He realizes it's "HE" (The Lord Jesus Christ!)

Many Christians are concerned with 'how'. 'Please give us procedures, plans, and programs,' they say, not realizing those things only produce perpetual struggle. The flesh always cries 'How, how how' The Bible always answers, 'HE.'

Romans 7:25 While we may readily agree with Paul that the answer lies not in a program or a procedure – it is harder for us to understand that neither is the answer found in a principle. What do I mean?

At this point in our study of Romans, we can say, 'Wow! I get it. The **penalty** for my sin was **paid on the Cross**. The **power** of my sin was **broken by the Cross**. **Preoccupation** with my sin **is eliminated because of the Cross**. I'm free! It's a principle I'm going to jot down in my journal and rejoice in.'

But wait. Even as I myself have immersed myself in the Book of Romans, in the past few days I've been on edge; my temper has flared; and I was taken aback by the ugliness of my own flesh until the Lord dealt with my heart again, saying, 'You are free. But you are missing out on what only I can produce as you spend quality time with ME. (Spend the kind of quality time with Me that you would like someone to spend with you! There's your example: Treat Me like you would like to be treated. Not a business relationship but a love relationship! ☺) Even if you have the principles down and the theology right, without spending time with Me, there will be no self-control and peace, love and joy, gentleness and goodness, faith and meekness. Those only come from spending time with Me.' Even Jesus Christ ministered out of the abundance of His relationship with the Father!☺

Thus, I have found myself in the past few days more eager than ever to be in the presence of the Lord – for, while I have always been wary of programs, I have been prone to intrigue with positional truth. In recent days, however, the Lord has been reminding me once again, 'The answer lies in spending time with Me – not legalistically, but just because without Me you can do nothing.' ("I am the Vine you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in them bear much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" John 15:5)

◆ This afternoon, I was kneeling beside my bed, enjoying the Lord. As I got up to let in some air, my finger got caught between the two windows. Now, although this was just the kind of irritation that had been getting to me in the past few day, this time I didn't get upset at all. Why? It wasn't because I was reading a book on how not to get mad when your finger gets stuck in the window. No, it's because I was simply enjoying the Lord's presence.

Who shall deliver me? Not 'how practically' or 'what positional truth theologically' – but Who shall deliver me? Like Paul, I declare to you emphatically that Jesus Christ is the key!