

Salvation by Faith Alone: The Book of Romans

Who is the Man of Romans 7?

Lesson #8 for November 25, 2017

Scriptures: Romans 7.

1. In this chapter Paul described the terrible struggle that sinners go through in abandoning the sinful lifestyle and becoming true Christians. Scholars have debated at length about whether it is a description of Paul's own personal experience. If it is a description of Paul's own personal experience, was he talking about the struggle before his conversion—which, presumably, he would date to the Damascus road experience? Or, was he talking about the struggle with sin even after he became a Christian? Did he have any twinges of conscience before the Damascus road experience? Or, was that a lightening bolt out of the blue? What was Saul/Paul's response to the stoning of Stephen? (See AA 112, 113.) At first, Saul/Paul became more determined to destroy Christians. Then, Paul had a "fruit basket upset." It is possible that Paul had memorized a large portion of the Old Testament in Hebrew. After Damascus, it was time to rethink the entire meaning of Scripture. So, Paul went to Arabia for about 3 years.
2. In Romans 5:1, we read that we can have peace with God. But, that certainly does not guarantee peace with anyone else, especially the Devil!
3. In Romans 6 we are told that baptism is to represent the burial of our old ideas and ways of living. We are supposed to rise to a new life. But, we soon discover that the Devil is alive and well and so are our old habits. In fact, if we are trying to live a new life, a Christian life, the Devil will become even more active!
4. But, Paul stated his belief clearly in Romans 6:14 by saying: "We are not under law but under grace." Shouldn't that take care of it all? Does it? Paul proceeded to say in Romans 6:23 (GNB) that, "Sin pays its wage: death." God does not kill people. The second death is a consequence of separation from God, not a penalty. (Genesis 2:17) God needed to prove that the consequences of sin are death, and that is the reason for the very costly death of Jesus. Satan had claimed—and would do anything to prove—that the wages of sin are not death! So, we can see that the stakes are very high. Satan claims that everyone who dies belongs to him. But, by rising from the dead in His own power, Jesus broke open the grave and destroyed Satan's claims. (John 10:18; John 2:19; Matthew 26:61) Do we believe that "sin pays its wage: death"? Notice that Jesus said, "God, why are you forsaking Me," and not "Why are you killing Me." (Matthew 27:46)
5. So, what is the solution to this dilemma? For many Christians it is the process of "justification" which means that we are "declared righteous" by God. That raises several questions. If God can "declare us righteous" without any change actually taking place in us, how does that relate to this struggle with sin? If God declares us righteous, shouldn't that take care of everything? And shouldn't that take care of everyone so that everyone is saved? If that is true, why does He delay His second coming? Why doesn't God just "set everyone right" and come back? If we have a new attitude toward God, is that a real change? Is God more concerned about our past or about our future? (Compare Luke 15.) Is there any choice involved? Does love require a choice? If God could suddenly transform us without any consent on our part, why didn't He do that to Lucifer in the beginning?
6. Justification and sanctification together produce salvation. But, if we want to be "saved" or "healed," then is some change actually necessary? Do you agree with these words?

Bible students differ on whether Romans 7 was Paul's experience before or after his conversion. **Whatever position one takes, what's important is that Jesus' righteousness covers us and that in His righteousness we stand perfect before God, who promises to sanctify us, to give us victory over sin, and to conform us to "the image of his Son" (Rom. 8:29).** These are the crucial

points for us to know and experience as we seek to spread “the everlasting gospel” to “every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” (*Rev. 14:6*).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Sabbath, November 18. [Bold type is added.]

7. Here we see a conflict in metaphors. If our own behavior does not matter and Christ’s righteousness covers us completely, then we should not be talking about the struggle with sin. But, the Bible leaves us with this quandary: We are saved by our faith; (*Acts 16:31*) but, we are judged by our works. (*Ecclesiastes 12:13-14*; *Revelation 20:12-13*) Does God intend for us to struggle with this dichotomy throughout our Christian experience?
8. Read *Romans 7:1-6*. Does salvation come by keeping the rules? Paul tried to explain our relationship to the law by describing the experience of a woman who is married and whose husband dies. Once the husband is dead, she is free to remarry without committing adultery. This illustration would fit perfectly if it was the law that died. But, who died in this story? Paul made it very clear that he—not the law—is the one who died. That, of course, confuses things. We do not have any human illustrations of a woman who dies and then remarries! So, what actually happens? If God is the one who kills, then His forgiveness is sufficient. But, if sin pays its wage, then someone else cannot reap the consequences. (See *Ezekiel 18* and *33*.)

As the death of her husband delivers the woman from the law of her husband, so the death of the old life in the flesh, through Jesus Christ, delivers the Jews from the law they had been expected to keep until the Messiah fulfilled its types.

Now the Jews were free to “remarry.” They were invited to marry the risen Messiah and thus bring forth fruit to God. This illustration was one more device Paul used to convince the Jews that **they were now free to abandon the ancient system.**—*Ibid.** Sunday, November 19. [Bold type is added.]

Is that what Paul was saying?

9. So, now we are faced with several challenging questions. Who or what actually died in this illustration? Paul later said that he died. What did Paul ask the Jews to abandon? Were they trying to keep the law as a way of being saved? (See *Jeremiah 7*.) Does life go better when we do things God’s way? Or, is it better to live without law? As we know, our Christian friends have used these verses to say that the “law” has been done away with; it is dead. They believe they are now free to worship Christ as they see fit. Of course, they do not want to abandon any part of the moral law of Ten Commandments except the Sabbath. Is there any hint that Paul was trying to get rid of the Sabbath? Or, is it anywhere else in Scripture? They believe Christians should observe the other nine commandments! Is that a valid interpretation of this passage? Is there any evidence that Paul ever had such an idea in mind?

The apostle Paul, in relating his experience, presents an important truth concerning the work to be wrought in conversion. He says, “I was alive without the law once”—he felt no condemnation; “but when the commandment came,” when the law of God was urged upon his conscience, “sin revived, and I died.” Then he saw himself a sinner, condemned by the divine law. **Mark, it was Paul, and not the law, that died.**—Ellen G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy,** book 4, 297.1. (1884); Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary,** vol. 6, 1076.7. [Bold type is added.]

10. What law was Paul talking about in *Romans 7*? As we are well aware, there have been several different definitions of *law*. Perhaps the narrowest definition is one suggesting that the law refers to the Ten Commandments only. To a faithful Jew like Paul, the law would typically refer to the five books written by Moses and known as the *Torah*. But, Jesus pointed out that sometimes the word *Law* was used to refer to the entire Old Testament. (*John 10:34*; *Psalms 82:6*) So, what did Paul have in mind in this passage? Or, was he talking about the whole idea of law? Does Paul give us any hint? No legal system will ever save anyone.

11. Read Romans 7:7. We immediately recognize that Paul was referring to the tenth commandment in this passage. Wouldn't that suggest that in the previous passage the law that "died" would be the Ten Commandments? Or, can law die? How do you teach your children to obey? Do you follow the directions in the manual for your new car? Why? How did your children learn to brush their teeth? Was it because of fear of punishment? Do they still brush their teeth? Why?
12. Seventh-day Adventists have explained their understanding of this passage as follows: The moral law is a direct reflection of God's character and is summed up by the two great commandments that Jesus Himself quoted in Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34; and Luke 10:25-28. It is based on eternal principles that will never change. But, the books of Moses describe a great number of other laws and rules and statutes that no longer applied to people after the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.
13. Why do you suppose Paul discussed the tenth commandment? It is interesting to note that in the books of Moses, there is a death sentence associated with the breaking of every commandment except the tenth! Why was that? Is it possible to take someone to court and prove that he has been coveting? Covetousness is not apparent externally; it is only in the mind. So, as human beings, we are really only able to recognize covetousness in ourselves. The tenth commandment actually forbids any evil desire. One must break it before he breaks any other commandment. It is completely internal, in our minds. That goes along with 1 John 3:4 which actually says, "Sin is rebelliousness." It fits also with all of Jesus's expansions of the law in the Sermon on the Mount. (Matthew 5-7)
14. Before his experience on the Damascus road, Paul had believed that he was doing well in the eyes of God. As a Pharisee of the Pharisees, no doubt, he would have claimed as did the rich young ruler: "Ever since I was young, I have obeyed all these commandments." (Matthew 19:20; Mark 10:20; Luke 18:21, *GNB*) Paul's external behavior met the criteria the Pharisees had set up to measure the performance of a good Jew. But, when Paul looked at the tenth commandment, he recognized that it was a commandment that forbade even thinking wrong thoughts. It made him angry. He was willing to do what he believed God required him to *do*; but, he thought it was an intrusion into his privacy for God to tell him what he was allowed to *think*!
15. But, after considering the issue as a Christian, Paul came to a very different conclusion. He recognized that in virtually every case, we as human beings break the tenth commandment before we break any of the others. Thus, if God wants to create a perfect society in heaven and invite some of us to live there, He can only take people to heaven who do not even want to sin! Thus, the tenth commandment specifically becomes a guarantee of future safety in the heavenly kingdom and in the earth made new.
16. Before his Christian experience began, Paul was quite comfortable with his external behavior. He could read the first nine commandments and feel quite smug. So, what should our attitude be toward this whole issue?
17. Before Paul wrote Romans, he wrote Galatians. In Galatians 3:24, he stated clearly that the law is our "babysitter" to protect us until we learn to do right because it is right.
18. The Bible study guide goes to some length in pointing out an important principle. The law is necessary because it points out sin. Without it we would not know what sin is. But, the law was never intended to be the cure for sin. It is not a means of salvation. Thus, the law performs an important and essential function; but, it can do nothing for our salvation.
19. Read Romans 7:12 (*GNB*). Thus, Paul concluded by saying that "the Law itself is holy, and the commandment is holy, right, and good." The law serves very well to do what it is supposed to do, pointing out sin!
20. Read Romans 7:13-15. What does it mean to be "a slave of sin"? (See Jeremiah 17:9.)
21. How is it that sin uses law to bring about our death? Evil is using something good to bring about something evil. Is the law at fault? Or, is it sin that is using the perfectly good tool or instrument

of the law to do its evil work? Sharp knives are very useful; but, they can also be dangerous!

22. Read Romans 7:14-20. All of us would agree that the requirements of the Ten Commandments or the moral law are reasonable and good. But, having concluded that, we have to admit with Paul that it is not natural for us to obey them. In fact, it is impossible for us to obey them in our own strength. Paul described his condition as being a slave of sin. He was not able to do what he wanted to do—what he knew was right—because sin operated in his body. Does the Devil make us do it? Does the Devil make us overeat? (James 1:14)
23. At what time in Paul's life did he face the struggle described in Romans 7:14-25? Was that before conversion? At the time of conversion? Or, after conversion? Have you ever found yourself in that struggle? Which commandment was it that led Paul finally to understand the real meaning of the commandments? What changed in his thinking? What should be the function of the commandments?
24. In Romans 6 and 7, Paul gave two illustrations of what it means to live lives under grace: 1) Like a new babe in the truth, having put to death the old man of sin; and 2) Like a woman who is bound to her husband so long as he is alive; but, when he dies, she is free to marry another.
25. Paul pointed out the truth that he must have learned in his days as a Pharisee: Trying to earn salvation by keeping the law never works. The law just keeps on pointing out our sins and failures. So, Paul told us that we must give up on that old way of trying to prove that we can live righteous lives in our own strength under the law, and instead, accept God's way of righteousness which is to focus on the life of Christ until "by beholding we become changed." (GC 555.1)
26. But, then Paul admitted that when we do this, Satan and his evil angels come out against us in full force. By continually reminding us of our weaknesses and old habits—our failures to keep the law—Satan hopes to discourage us until we give up on living the Christian life. The law is not what is at fault; it is Satan's use of the law to remind us of our sins that may prove discouraging.
27. Some Christians hide behind Paul's description in Romans 7. They are having trouble with the struggle to live a good life. So, they abandon that struggle and say it does not matter anyway because Christ can take care of it all. Is that what Paul intended?
28. Paul seemed to have been trying to divide up the body and the mind. Can that be done? What did he mean when he talked about "my members" or "the body"? What did he mean when he talked about "my inner self" or "the mind"? What part of Paul wanted to do good? What part of Paul found it impossible to do good? Were there actually two conflicting powers in Paul's body? Or, in his mind?
29. What is "the law of my mind" that Paul talked about? What is "the law of my body"? What is "the law of God"? What is "the law of sin"? Do we believe that there is a conflict or even a war going on inside us? Where does the great controversy actually take place? Can we identify personally with these experiences of Paul?
30. Sometimes, we have represented this conflict between good and evil as two angels, one good angel and one evil angel, tempting us to go in different directions. How do the Devil's temptations enter into this struggle? We know that there is no way in which the body can, in fact, contradict the mind. All of this conflict takes place within the mind. Do we understand how these different forces interact within our brains?
31. Our minds are the battlefield in the great controversy! Paul kept talking about two different aspects of our lives: the old man of sin vs. the new babe in Christ; the mind vs. the body; etc. People cannot be divided like that; but, we all know about the two forces that are at war in us.
32. At the end of his discussion of this controversy, Paul said: "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Romans 7:24, KJV) The word *wretched* that Paul used to describe himself in this verse is *talaipōros* which is used in only one other place in the New Testament—in Revelation 3 to describe the Laodiceans!

33. In what sense could Laodiceans be wretched? Aren't we the faithful, tithe-paying, health-reforming, Sabbathkeeping saints in the church of God? Could all of our efforts be wasted? God said that the Laodiceans made Him nauseated! (Revelation 3:16) Nauseated enough to vomit. (That is the real meaning of the Greek word *emeō*.) Why is that?

Christ declares that pretentious piety is nauseating to Him. To the ones so full of self-sufficiency He says, "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot." [Revelation 3:15] Their works are opposed to the holy principles of God's word.—Ellen G. White, *Special Testimonies*, Series B,* No. 2, 20.1.

A lifeless profession is nauseating to God. Christ can not present before the Father those who are lukewarm. [She then quoted Revelation 3:16-17.]—Ellen G. White, *General Conference Bulletin*,* April 6, 1903, par. 27. [Content in brackets is added.]

34. In any sense are we like the Jews referred to in Romans 2:19-20? Don't we claim to be "A guide for the blind, a light for those who are in darkness, ²⁰an instructor for the foolish, and a teacher for the ignorant"?
35. Do we not sometimes feel that we are "worn out from hard work" one of the meanings of the word *wretched* in Greek? Is that the result of trying to earn our own salvation by keeping the law, paying tithe, etc.?
36. As Seventh-day Adventists, we should be known for our picture of God and our explanation of the great controversy. Instead, we are thought of as legalists for our Sabbathkeeping, etc. Are we legalists? Or, do we present to the world a correct understanding of the plan of salvation?
37. This is not to suggest that there is no effort to be put forth to be saved. Note these words from Ellen White about Paul:

The life of the apostle Paul was a constant conflict with self. He [Paul] said, "I die daily." 1 Corinthians 15:31. His will and his desires every day conflicted with duty and the will of God. Instead of following inclination, he did God's will, however crucifying to his nature.—Ellen G. White, *Ministry of Healing** 452.4. Compare *ST*,* September 12, 1878, par. 8; *4T** 299.2 (1879); *YI*,* August 24, 1899, par. 3; *8T** 313.3; *LS** 237.1; *NL** 60.3; *IHP** 26.3; *RC** 291.8; *RH*,* October 15, 1908, par. 13. [Content in brackets is added.]

38. Our efforts need to be focused on developing and maintaining a close relationship with Christ through Bible study and prayer and not just on trying to keep the law. So, there is a struggle going on in the life of a true Christian.

The drunkard is despised and is told that his sin will exclude him from heaven; while **pride, selfishness, and covetousness too often go unrebuked. But these are sins that are especially offensive to God; for they are contrary to the benevolence of His character, to that unselfish love which is the very atmosphere of the unfallen universe.** He who falls into some of the grosser sins may feel a sense of his shame and poverty and his need of the grace of Christ; but pride feels no need, and so it closes the heart against Christ and the infinite blessings He came to give.—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ** 30.1; *5T** 337.2. [Bold type is added.]

39. Do we still have a way to go in our struggle against pride, selfishness, and covetousness?

Jesus had presented the cup of blessing to those who felt that they were "rich, and increased with goods" (Revelation 3:17), and had need of nothing, and they had turned with scorn from the gracious gift. He who feels whole, [Think of all the bad things he doesn't do, i.e., *the man who feels reasonably whole*.] who thinks that he is reasonably good, and is contented with his condition, does not seek to become a partaker of the grace and righteousness of Christ. Pride feels no need, and so it closes the heart against Christ and the infinite blessings He

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came to give. There is no room for Jesus in the heart of such a person.—Ellen G. White, *Mount of Blessing** 7.1; *SD** 301.4. [Contents in brackets is added.]

40. If we are serious about being Christians, then we still have work to do. God can only admit to heaven people who really want to be loving and kind all the time!

Your energies are required to co-operate with God. Without this, **if it were possible to force upon you with a hundredfold greater intensity the influences of the Spirit of God, it would not make you a Christian, a fit subject for heaven.** The stronghold of Satan would not be broken. There must be the willing and the doing on the part of the receiver. There must be an action, represented as coming out from the world and being separate. There must be a doing of the words of Christ.—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*,* December 28, 1891, par. 2; *Ibid.*,* May 18, 1904, par. 9; *MB** 142.1; *HL** 304.5. [Bold type is added.]

41. God will never try to force us to do His will. *Salvation* means healing. If we refuse God's medicine, there is nothing more that He can do for us.

The effort to earn salvation by one's own works inevitably leads men to pile up human exactions as a barrier against sin. For, seeing that they fail to keep the law, they will devise rules and regulations of their own to force themselves to obey. All this turns the mind away from God to self. His love dies out of the heart, and with it perishes love for his fellow men. A system of human invention, with its multitudinous exactions, will lead its advocates to judge all who come short of the prescribed human standard. The atmosphere of selfish and narrow criticism stifles the noble and generous emotions, and causes men to become self-centered judges and petty spies.—Ellen G. White, *Mount of Blessing** 123.1.

42. So, what about us? Are we developing characters like that of Christ?

It is the will of God that each professing Christian shall perfect a character after the divine similitude. **By studying the character of Christ revealed in the Bible, by practicing His virtues, the believer will be changed into the same likeness of goodness and mercy.** Christ's work of self-denial and sacrifice brought into the daily life will develop the faith that works by love and purifies the soul. There are many who wish to evade the cross-bearing part, but the Lord speaks to all when He says, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." Matthew 16:24.—Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students Regarding Christian Education** 249.1; see also *GC** 555.1. [Bold type is added.]

43. Do you agree with Paul's conclusion? Is it possible to "serve God's law only with my mind, while my human nature serves the law of sin"? Can we at the same time serve more than one law? Can we serve more than one master?

44. In Romans 7, Paul struggled to try to describe a difficult and very personal conflict. He wanted us to understand clearly what the problem is before he gave his final solution in Romans 8. Some Christians, after reading Romans 5:1 and 6:14, for example, want to leave all of the work to Christ. They do not believe that they have any individual responsibility. But, Paul held no such illusion. He pictured our battle as a very real one.

45. Do we understand these issues clearly? Are we ready to "fight the good fight of faith"? (2 Timothy 4:7) In light of the great controversy over God's character and government, do we clearly understand our role and God's role in winning this battle?

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