

Romans 7:7-25 What can Change us?

1. What has been the most significant piece of insight into the dynamics of discipleship you have gained through this series in Romans so far? why?

Read Romans 7:7-25

2. (7,8,13) The purpose of the law is to show us something. What does it show us and how?

It defines sin – we would not know what sin was apart from the law defining it.

It stirs up sin – as Augustine put it underneath every transgression ever sin is the desire to be God. We want to be in control of our lives, our world, and we resent anything that infringes upon that freedom. The power of sin is that we want to do the very thing the law prohibits.

3. (8-9) In your own experience how does the law produce / stir up sin?

I would suspect that all of us have an experience where the enjoyment of something is exemplified because it is forbidden or taboo. While we may be open to sharing where we have enjoyed breaking a societal law we may be less open to share stories of how the law of God has stirred up in us transgression.

If your group can navigate the former but not the latter I might suggest as a leader that you have an example yourself ready to go to invite your participants into that place.

4. (8-9) What do you think Paul means when he says “I was alive apart from the law, but then the commandment came and I died”? Have you had this experience?

Paul would I suspect come to the law and feel good, righteous, secure. He could check off that he had fulfilled the law. His whole society would have been structured toward that end. His upbringing and his participation in the movement of the Pharisees would have given him the social relationships to support and enable his obedience. All of this would leave him believing that he was alive.

Then however the law brought him under condemnation, revealed to him that there was no way that he could fulfill it's demands. He found that when the law told him not to do something that was the very thing he wanted to do. He came to find the power of sin. It left him under the sentence of death.

The personal piece of this question again would be served by you as leader being open and willing to share how you came to an awareness of your sin through the law. This transparency will enable others in your group to engage fully in the question.

5. (7-8) Why do you think it was the law "thou shalt not covet" that came home to Paul?

Up until this point Paul would have thought that the law had to do with externals. The law thou shalt not covet is a law that invites consideration of the internal matters of the heart. What Paul saw in his heart would be something we would be able to see in all of our hearts. That is that we lack contentment. All of us have those things where we say – I would be happy if... If I had – If I looked – if I accomplished – if I could get rid of this thing. We are envious, jealous of those who have the thing that we long for.

You see this expressed by Jesus in the sermon on the mount that the law is after an internal heart issue as well. You have heard it said thou shalt not murder but I tell you anyone who hates another in their heart has already committed murder.

6. (14-25) Who is the "I" that Paul is talking about here? (It might be helpful to explore this question from a few different perspectives – is Paul's "I" an unconverted person?, converted?, Paul himself? Paul taking on a different perspective?) How does identifying the "I" in these different ways help us understand Christian experience? Which one do you think is right?

Unconverted? Can an unconverted person say – I love God's law – I delight in it – I hate my sin?

Converted? Does a converted person say I have sold out to sin – when Paul has said we are rescued from slavery to sin.

Is it Paul? This is the predominant way that this passage has been interpreted. We certainly have the experience where there is an internal fight within us, where there is this internal struggle between competing desires. While that is indeed a Christian experience (See Galatians 5) if we take this to be Paul than it says that the predominant impact of the gospel upon us is to increase our misery for the predominant feel of this text is condemnation, despair, helplessness.

The preface of the next question reflects on Paul taking on the beliefs of his objectors – which Tim sought to invite us to see as the way to read this part of Romans.

In the sermon Tim took the perspective that Paul is taking on the thinking of his objectors – to say that if you believe the law can change us - all you leave me to is crying out my helplessness for I am unable in myself to obey the law. This sets us up beautifully for chapter 8 where it is the Spirit that grounds us in the glorious love of God in Jesus that shapes new creation in us and through us. The last question leans into that interpretation.

7. In Christ through the power of the Spirit all of the laws of God become promises. This is what I am forming in you. Discuss.

We are at a time in the Christian church where there is often an antinomian (anti-law) leaning. This leaning is often borne of a belief that some of the laws of scripture were culturally conditioned and no longer apply to us. This then discredits the whole and so it would be important I think to see the law as having a place in the life of the follower of Jesus. But if so – what kind of place?

Paul calls the law holy, righteous, good – words that are all used to describe the character of God. We can say then that the law reveals to us what God is like.

If the Spirit is given to us that we would be transformed into the likeness of Jesus – who is the image of the invisible God – then the law points us to who we are being recreated to be. We are having formed in us the love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness and self-control of the living God. The law gives us a picture then of what the Spirit is doing in us.

In Jesus by the power of the Spirit all of God's laws become promises. When we grasp this we then have a book – a bible - not of commands – but of promises.