

Facilitator Notes for *Set Free!* – A Study in Romans  
Lesson 10 ~ Torn Between Two Lovers Romans 7

**PLEASE DON'T READ THESE NOTES UNTIL YOU HAVE COMPLETED YOUR LESSON.  
HEARING GOD FOR YOURSELF IS WAY BETTER THAN MY COMMENTS!**

## Questions

Read **Romans 7:1-6**

1. Why doesn't keeping and living by the law apply to the born-again Christ-follower (7:1, 4, 6)? Paul says that the Old Testament law only applies to the living. You don't write laws to order the conduct of dead people. Those who have trusted Christ ARE dead (united with Christ in HIS death) and therefore we are free from the authority of the law. In Christ's death we have been released from trying to keep the law. The result of our freedom is a new way to serve God. We are guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit rather than being guided by a list of rules and regulations that have no power to help us obey them.

♥ Does it surprise you that Christ-followers are not expected to live by the law? Why or why not?  
♥ Does this mean that a Christ-follower does not need to live a good and upright life? Why or why not? We are still called to live good and righteous lives – but by a completely different way. Now we have Someone who can actually help us in this process. 7:4 says we still produce good fruit (good deeds) for God.

2. Under the Old Testament law, a man and women were bound to each other in marriage until one of them died. After the death of one, the living spouse was released from the law of marriage and free to marry another. What legal changes happen to a woman when her husband dies (7:2-3)? Under the law (the example Paul is using here) death released a woman from her marriage vows and she is free to marry again and would not be accused of violating the law.

What similar changes happen to Christ-followers when they die to the law (7:4)? We died to the law and are released from its demands and trying to keep it just like the woman who is released from her marriage vows if her husband dies. Paul's point is that we died to keeping the law and are now joined to Another (Him who was raised from the dead). We don't live under the "old marriage" anymore – we are now in a new relationship.

♥ What were some rules taught in your religious training? Do you feel more married to Christ or to some religious code? How so?

♥ We must die to the law in order to be united to Christ. Why can't we follow both the law and Christ? Because trying to follow the law and living by the power of the Spirit are two completely different ways to live. If you live by one, you can't live by the other. Even though the end result may look similar on the outside, these are two opposite ways to live. Living by the law will cause either condemnation or pride in the heart. Living by the Spirit actually transforms our hearts!

3. Why do we need to be released from the law (7:5)? The law, which tells us what we can or can't do, actually arouses the sinful desires of our old nature which then produces sinful deeds which leads to spiritual death. It is a fact that if you tell the sinful nature DON'T – it immediately wants to do what it can't – and will eventually give in and do the very thing it is not supposed to do.

♥ Can you think of some experiences in your life when the law seemed to **arouse** evil desires?  
♥ Using the analogy of marriage, who were you married to originally (7:5)? How did that marriage work out? Does your "ex-husband" continue to cause problems? How so?

4. What is the difference between living a holy life by trying to keep the law and living a holy life by the power of the Holy Spirit who lives in us (7:6)? Consider **Ezekiel 36:26-27** and **2 Corinthians 3:17**. The main difference is the **POWER SOURCE**. If we try to keep God's law, we are dependent on willpower. If we live by the Holy Spirit within us, he provides the power to make right choices and to love and serve God and others. Although the goal is the same (a righteous life), these two ways to live could not be more different. Willpower is living by rules, Spirit-power is living out of relationship. The Holy Spirit will not only give us the power to live right, but he changes our hearts and gives us the desire to live a life that is pleasing to God. Living under the law is bondage, but living by the Spirit is freedom. If we try to follow the law, we are left to trying to figure things out for ourselves (especially in areas that the law doesn't address), but if we live by the Spirit we are in a real relationship and he will give us guidance as we ask and listen. Living by the law does nothing to change our heart. Living by the Spirit actually changes us to be persons of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

- ♥ Do you live by *rules* or out of *relationship*? How would you explain the difference between these two?
  - ♥ What verse makes clear that we are neither legalists obeying mere rules nor libertines obeying no rules?
- 7:4 – we still bear fruit (good deeds) for God**
- ♥ How can the Spirit help us please God in a way that following the law can't?

See answer to Question 4

Read **Romans 7:7-13**.

(If you usually use the **NIV** Bible, it might be helpful to also read these verses in the **NLT**.)

From the previous verses (7:1-6), one might come to the conclusion that God's law does more harm than good and should be discarded for it cannot rescue humanity from the bondage of sin and it seems to actually increase our tendency to sin rather than help us not to sin! But Paul wants to make clear in these verses (7:7-13) that the law itself is not the problem, for God's law is holy, right and good (7:12). However, because the law *reveals, provokes* and *condemns* sin in us, we may find ourselves blaming God's law for our problems instead of the real culprit, sin.

5. Humans did not always have God's law. The law was given during the time of Moses, long after the time of Adam, Noah, Abraham and Joseph. Why did God give his law and commandments (7:7)? God's law tells us what sin is. "It points an accusing finger at specific acts of disobedience and names them as sin rather than "mistakes" or "character flaws."

**The Message** phrases Romans 7:7 this way:

*But I can hear you say, "If the law code was as bad as all that, it's no better than sin itself." That's certainly not true. The law code had a perfectly legitimate function. Without its clear guidelines for right and wrong, moral behavior would be mostly guesswork. Apart from the succinct, surgical command, "You shall not covet," I could have dressed covetousness up to look like a virtue and ruined my life with it.*

- ♥ If there were no law, would there, then, be no sin? Why or why not? Sin is always sin and sin always has its consequences. So, if we sin, even though we don't know it is wrong, we will still reap the consequences. It is just that we will be very confused as to **WHY** and we wouldn't know what the problem was or how to fix it.

- ♥ Is a person a sinner even if they know nothing of God's law? Why or why not?

See above answer.

6. Paul uses *coveting*, the last of the *Ten Commandments*, as an example of sin (7:7). The first nine commandments forbid *outward actions* (**Exodus 20:1-17**), but the tenth (do not covet) forbids an inner attitude of the heart. What do you think is Paul's point in choosing this sin as his example? If all of God's law just concerned outward behavior, we might be fooled into thinking we can actually keep the law. But the commandment against coveting shows that law concerns the heart, not just outward behavior and we cannot, by willpower, make our heart not covet. By choosing this "sin of the heart," Paul was proving his point that the law tells us what is wrong but it provides no power to help us not do the wrong thing.

♥ Why is it important that we recognize sin and our sinful behavior?

Sin does it damage whether or not we know it is wrong. When it comes to sin, ignorance is not bliss. Also, if we don't know something is wrong, we will not know what is causing our problems and will not know what to change. Just as with sickness, we need a diagnosis before we can work on a cure.

♥ When did you become aware of your sin? Did God's law have anything to do with this awareness?

7. How does sin use the law for its own purposes (7:8)? What does this say about the character and power of sin?

Sin, which is alive and active, uses God's good law to make us want to sin! Sin knows that if you tell someone NO – the person will want to do what is forbidden.

The Message phrases **Romans 7:8** this way:

Don't you remember how it was? I do, perfectly well. The law code started out as an excellent piece of work. What happened, though, was that sin found a way to pervert the command into a temptation, making a piece of "forbidden fruit" out of it. The law code, instead of being used to guide me, was used to seduce me.

All of this shows the power and deviousness of sin. It takes something that is good and twists it and uses it for its own deceitful purposes. Sin is much more powerful than we are. We cannot fight it on our own and if we are to defeat it, it will be by the power of the Holy Spirit (not willpower).

♥ Because sin uses the law for its own purposes, does this make the law bad? Why or why not? See answer to Question 7

♥ Why is it wrong to blame the law for our sinful behavior? The law is just the messenger. It is no more to blame for sin than a detective who discovers a corpse is to blame for the murder.

**St. Augustine** gives a good example of the dynamic described in 7:8 in his *Confessions*:

One night, at the age of 16, in company with a gang of "naughty adolescents," he shook a pear tree and stole its fruit. His motive, he confesses, was not that he was hungry, for they threw the pears to pigs. "I stole something which I had in plenty and of much better quality. My desire was to enjoy not what I sought by stealing, but merely the excitement of thieving and the doing of what was wrong. Was it possible," he asked himself, "to take pleasure in what was illicit for no reason other than that it was not allowed?"

♥ How is Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden an example of the dynamic described in 7:8? When was a time when you found the dynamic described in 7:8 to be true in your life?

8. In what way does the good law bring *death* instead of *life* (7:9-11)?

The law clearly shows us our sin and our sinful nature and we KNOW we are guilty, condemned to spiritual death. Because of the law we see ourselves as we truly are; self-delusion is ended when we realize we cannot please God through keeping the law. Commands like "do not covet" show us that we cannot control the desire of our hearts.

**7:11-** Sin always deceives us. It disguises itself so that we don't recognize it; it makes itself appear attractive; it makes us believe there will be no negative consequences; it promises to satisfy more than the last time; it makes us believe that it doesn't really matter.

9. The analogy of the law being like a mirror is often used. A mirror can show us our dirty face, but it can do nothing to make our face clean. How is the law like a mirror (7:13)?

The law clearly reveals our sin just like a mirror might reveal a dirty face. But just as the mirror can do nothing to cleanse the face, so the law provides no power to actually help us keep it. And, even though it shows us our sin, it has no way of forgiving or cleansing us from the sin we do commit.

♥ How would you explain in your own words the following statement:

*The law results in death, but death is not due to the law.*

The law, because we cannot keep it, leads to death. However, that death is due to sin, not the law.

♥ What is the role of the law in the life of a Christ-follower? What can it do? What can't it do?

See answer to Question 9

Read Romans 7:14-25.

10. In a sentence or two, summarize the dilemma expressed in these verses (7:14-25).

If I want to do something good, I don't. If I don't want to do something bad or wrong, I end up doing it. I have no power to carry out even my good desires for the sin that is in me is stronger than good intentions.

♥ Can you relate to this dilemma? Why or why not?

♥ What are some of the areas of your life where you have been caught in this dilemma?

11. These verses from **Romans 7** have always raised the question of exactly who Paul was referring to in his description of the person struggling with sin. Is Paul describing a born again Christ follower or a non-believer? What clues do you see in this passage that might lead you to believe that Paul was talking about someone who **has** experienced new life in Christ?

- The verb tense changes in these verses to present tense suggesting Paul is talking about a present condition
- Only a believer would desire to do what is right and pleasing to God and would delight in God's law (7:22)
- Only a believer would see themselves as a miserable and desperate sinner. One who does not believe in God is generally not concerned with their sin or thinks of themselves as a good person.
- This description describes what many of us, as Christians, feel about our own battle with sin!

♥ How does a non-believer usually view themselves when it comes to sin and God's law? Have you ever known a non-believer to be in this kind of anguish over their sin?

See answer to Question 11

♥ What help does **Galatians 5:17** give in understanding the struggle Paul describes?

This verse gives the reason for the conflict we feel taking place in us

12. Why doesn't knowing God's law (thus knowing right from wrong) and having the desire to do the right thing able to prevent us from sinning (7:14, 17, 18, 20, 21-23)?

We are sold into slavery and sin is our master. It is sin in us that makes us do what don't want to do. In other words, sin is stronger than willpower. Even though we belong to Christ, we still have our sin nature and the conflict we feel inside is very real.

What is the solution to this dilemma (**Galatians 5:16-18**)? (More about this in **Romans 8**!)

We can have victory when we live by the Spirit which means we can access his power to help us do this right thing. His power IS stronger than sin or our sin nature.

♥ By what means are you trying to live a life pleasing to God? What are the results?

13. In spite of his conflicted feelings, why is Paul thankful (7:24-25)? What does he mean by this?

Our miserable-ness drives us to Jesus and shows us our need for him! For this we can be thankful!

♥ How can a person's anguish and struggle with sin be beneficial (7:24-25)? In our human bodies, will we ever be free from this struggle? Why or why not? Can we expect victory? Why or why not?

We will not be free from our sin nature until we someday see Jesus face to face. However, we do grow, change and are transformed, becoming more and more like Jesus. We can expect to have really victories and see real progress in our spiritual life. Thanks be to God!

## *Response*

Imagine you are driving down a straight, deserted road in South Dakota. No other vehicles are in sight. You haven't seen any speed limit sign and you gradually increase your speed until you are comfortably cruising along at 90 mph. Then you pass a sign that says the speed limit is 75 mph. What would be your reaction? How is God's law like the speed limit sign? Were you breaking the law before you saw the sign? Why or why not? What are some possible reactions you might have after seeing the sign? How might "human nature" reveal itself now that you know the speed limit? If you get caught speeding, is the speed limit sign in any way responsible for your behavior? Why or why not?

Discuss with your small group how this analogy applies to **Romans 7**. How is this analogy helpful to you in understanding the role of God's law in your life and the relationship between law and sin?

**Ezekiel 36:26** I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. **27** And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

**2Corinthians 3:17** Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

**Galatians 5:16** So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. **17** For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. **18** But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.