

Romans 7:1-8:17

Study 7

How to Be a Better Person

INTRODUCTION

It seems like everyone wants to get on the "self improvement" bandwagon. Bookstores are full of titles on how to improve yourself, whether it's by dressing better, eating better, bringing up your kids better, selling better, communicating better - you name it, there's a book designed to make you do it better.

Ancient Israel had exactly such a book. It was called "The Torah", or "Law." There was a rule for everything. And as we've seen in the earlier chapters of Romans, the Jews thought it made them experts on everything. "You are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth," says Paul. But there's a problem! "You then who teach others, do you not teach yourself?" (2:19-21) They've got the law. But they can't (or don't, or won't) live it out.

Here in Romans 7 and 8, Paul puts himself in the place of a Jew caught in exactly that struggle. He says, there's a way of self improvement that doesn't work, and a way that does. In 7:6, there's a summary of what Paul's saying...

"But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code."

Read through Romans 7:1-25

THE WAY OF THE LAW

If you're trying to improve yourself by what Paul calls "observing the law", you're doomed for frustration. It's a frustration that Paul draws out at length through ch 7.

On our way through Romans, we've brushed past many references to the Old Testament law, and it's effects. It's time we looked more closely at what Paul's saying about the law.

1. Track down these references, and make a note of what they say about "US JEWS" and the LAW.

- 3:20
- 3:28
- 3:31
- 4:14-15
- 5:13
- 5:20
- 6:14

- 7:1
- 7:5
- 7:7
- 7:8

2. Is the law BAD or GOOD?

3. Is human nature BAD or GOOD?

4. What happens when you feed GOOD COMMANDS into a BAD NATURE?

Notice, the whole of chapter 7 is addressed to those who Paul calls “brothers... who know the law.” He’s talking to his fellow Jews.

5. According to verses 1 to 4, what status do these “brothers” now have in relation to the law?

6. Previously, what did the law do to them?

7. What new situation do they “serve under” now?

Think back to Deuteronomy 30:1-6. What promise did God make long ago?
Where are they on God’s time line now? (Compare with Rom 2:29)

8. Trace through the rest of chapter 7 (v7-25), keeping in mind that Paul is speaking of himself as a “typical Israelite.” Look at the effects the law had on Israel. How could you best summarise the situation?

9. What is the only way out? (v25)

THE WAY OF THE SPIRIT

Now read chapter 8:1-17. The focus switches from “Israel” to “those who are in Christ Jesus.” The fact that their ‘sinful nature’ has been put to death in Christ is not the end of the story!

10. How many times is “The Spirit” mentioned in verses 1 to 17?

11. What do you think it means that “the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us?:

How does this happen?

12. Paul tells us that our minds and lives can be controlled by the Spirit of God. How is this described in verse 12?

Look back to 4:25 (a difficult verse at the time!) Does 8:12 help understand what it means that Jesus was ‘raised for our justification/ righteousness’?

13. To Paul, this great truth about what God has done in us through Christ by the Spirit leaves us with an important obligation. What is it, and what will it involve? (Start looking for ideas in verse 12!)

14. Summarise what things will be necessary for us to live better lives. What is God's part, and what is our part?

Think it through

What would you say from this passage to people who think they can be right with God by “keeping the ten commandments”?