

Romans: Comment and Commentary

“Therefore, accept one another,
just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God (15:7).”

Parenthesis: This verse seems to summarize the book.

“Accept one another:” the purpose of the book (12-15)

“Just as Christ accepted us:” the foundation of the exhortation (1-11)

- I. Prologue, 1:1-17
- II. The Universality of Human Sinfulness, 1:18-3:20
- III. The Universality of Divine Righteousness for the Jew and Gentile: Justification, 3:21-4:25
- IV. The Assurance of God’s Righteousness: Sanctification (Deliverance from the Power of Sin), 5:1-8:39
 - A. The Fruit of God’s Righteousness: Surety, 5:1-11
 - B. The Cause of Surety: The Triumph of Christ, 5:12-21
 - C. The Surety of Surety: Our Union with Christ, 6:1-23
 - 1. Union with Christ: a new identity (Baptism), 6:1-14
 - 2. Union with Christ: a new obedience (enslavement), 6: 15-23
 - 3. Union with Christ: a new marriage, 7:1-25

In this section of Romans, Paul is showing the consequences of our deliverance as it applicates to the mechanic of our struggle with the power of sin in daily lives. The guilt of mankind (1:18-3:20) has been remitted in the atoning work of Christ and God’s divine declaration of believers’ righteous state (3:21-4:25). With the new position secure in Christ, believers are being delivered from sin’s power (5:1-8:39) daily and, someday, finally.

A way of looking at this chapter, a text that explains how Christians have been released from the law through death as the means of sanctification is this: release from the law (vv. 1-6), defense of the law (vv. 7-13), and the weakness of the law (vv. 14-25).

Chapter six emphasizes the believer’s freedom from the universal grip of sin through a new identity in death and a new enslavement. Chapter seven emphasizes the believer’s freedom from legal righteousness or law keeping through a “second marriage.” In combining the chapters, you have a death that releases in each of the metaphors.

- 1. The believer and the law, vv. 1-6
 - a. The binding power of the law, v. 1
 - Some versions do not translate the connective “or” in v. 1. The reference seems to be to 6:14 stating that the believer is “not under the law.” Paul

explains that statement. The word “man” is generic meaning either gender. To make the illustration work, he has the man die, but the law is the same in either case. The man represents the law; the man dies; the woman has liberty to remarry, and she married another, Christ. “Law” is a reference to the Mosaic Code; Paul never uses the word for secular law.

b. The illustration, vv. 2-3

A married woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives, but should he decease, the woman is free from the law of her marriage and can marry another. The law binds, death frees! Death ends marital obligation and argues Paul, a death has occurred through Christ freeing us from the cursing aspect of legal obedience. Says Mounce, “As a woman whose husband has died is free to marry another, so also are believers, since they have died to the law, free to belong to Christ.”

The “man” represents “the old man under the law,” the person seeking to be justified before God by legal rectitude. The wife is the innermost self who is free to be attached to another. It is a metaphor.

“Death” refers to deliverance from legalistic righteousness through Christ (6:6, 7, 8, 11).

Paul made the same point in chapter 6 with two other analogies: baptism and enslavement.

c. The illustration interpreted, vv. 4-6

1) The fact of freedom from the law, v. 4

Believers are free from the law to know God by a different way; they died in Christ (“body of Christ” refers to our Lord’s physical body [6:3-11]) to the law and are free in Christ to live. Christ died so that “you should be married to another man.” “As Christ died for believers, they must now die to sin. As Christ was raised, they, too, are raised to new spiritual life of service to God,” says Utley. See 6:22.

Parenthesis: The believer’s death

In what sense has the believer died to the law? Some commentators suggest that the Law of Moses is not applicable to the saint, but that we are under the “Law of Christ.” This seems to be a difficult view to take of “death to the law” because of the New Testament writers’ frequent appeal to the Old Testament law as authoritative and supportive though certain aspects of the law (the ceremonial, the fourth commandment, dietary restrictions, etc.) are not continued in the New Testament. As believers the function of the law to reveal the state of life without God and the guilt of it has been fulfilled. That purpose has been accomplished. It brought us to the need for Christ by revealing our separation from Christ. Wiersbe has an interesting comment. “The Law did not die,

because God's law still rules over men. We died to the Law, and it no longer has dominion over us."

- 2) The reality of death under the law, v. 5
Christ's death is the basis of justification and sanctification. Legal righteousness, the way of obedience, is the path to death, not life. The law aroused sinful passions; it did not curb them.
- 3) The results of freedom from the law, v. 6
Believers died in Christ and are free as much as a woman is free martially should her mate die. Consequently, believers are united to another to serve Him. "Newness of the spirit" is probably a reference to the Holy Spirit who is before the reader in the next chapter.

Note: This passage is an illustration of the believer's separation from legal righteousness as a basis of salvation. Believers died to the law in Christ. The law prevented "marriage" to another without a death. It is not about rules regarding the possibility of remarriage if a legal union has been dissolved for reasons other than death.

2. Parenthesis #1: The lost, sin, and the law, vv. 7-12
I find that 7:7-25 is composed of two parentheses in Paul's argument in which he poses two hypothetical questions and answers them. In both cases, he uses his own experience to make his points ("I"). Each question has to do with the place of the law: the first (v. 7) concerns the purpose of the law for unbelievers and the second (v. 13) concerns the law and the believer. Paul knew that his insistence on liberation from the law would have been provocative to his Jewish readers and so took time to anticipate and answer their objections.
 - a. The question stated, v. 7a
Paul returns to the use of literary dialogue: questions and answers (6:1, 15; 7:1, 13). The apostle anticipates an objection. Since he speaks negatively about the law, is the law sinful? Paul will quote from the Ten Commandments, so the referent is the Mosaic Law. The Abrahamic Covenant put no stress on sin, only blessings, so it was necessary to teach the nation about their sinful propensities. Only through this could the nation be prepared for their redeemer. In this respect, the law was a mercy from God. Though believers have died to the law, the law had a positive purpose.
 - b. The questions answered, vv. 7b-11
 - 1) The law reveals sin, v. 7b.
Paul ("I") answers by saying that as a "righteous" Pharisee, he would not have known his sinfulness without the tenth commandment. Though aware of this commandment, there was a time when its meaning struck his heart and revealed the depth of his sinfulness. Of all the commandments, Paul, a former adroit Pharisee, this is the one that he could not reinterpret (for examples of Pharisaic misinterpretation of the

law, see Matt 5:21-32). This one is unique among the ten because it deals with inward desires and thoughts; it is hard to externally define away an inward appetite.

2) The law stirs up sin, v. 8.

The law aroused and revealed Paul's wickedness. The law is a magnet that attracts. The law (Gen. 2:16-17) made it possible for Adam to rebel; the Mosaic code made it possible for the nation. Sin twists the function of the law from revealing, exposing, and condemning to encouraging and provoking. The weakness of the law is not the law itself; it is indwelling sin. God's perfect standard of righteousness is ineffective because of human frailty.

3) The law reveals spiritual death, vv. 9-11.

The original intent of the law was to give life; it revealed God's holy standard for life (i.e., perfection). The law became the occasion of death because it stirred Paul to see the folly of Pharisaic interpretation of the law. This knowledge of the law's function came to Paul on the Damascus Road when the light smote him.

"I was once alive" is a difficult phrase. I take it to mean when Paul, being once blinded by religious tradition and false interpretations, thought he was godly (Acts 23:1, Phil. 3:6, II Tim. 1:3). The law could not, and did not, perform its function. When he came to understand the law (when he grappled with the significance of the Tenth Commandment), it condemned him.

Paul's point (v. 11) is that sin cannot be known without the law. When he grasped the meaning of the law, he understood his sinfulness. Sin without the law is deceptive; it never tells us that sin is wrong; in fact, it tells us the opposite and it seems valid because it is consistent with our selfish passions.

c. The conclusion stated, v. 12

This verse is a direct answer to the question that introduced the paragraph. The law is holy; it reveals that people are not. The law is good when it comes to sanctification, not in justification!

3. Parenthesis #2: The believer, the law, and his old nature, vv. 13-25

As the law cannot save lawbreakers, so the law cannot justify Christians. While the law is holy, righteous, and good, it serves to reveal weakness and inability. The law cannot redeem, because the lost person is under the universal sway of sin; the law cannot sanctify because even believers are still subject to the power of sin. For the lost and saved, the law functions to drive sinners to faith in Christ. People are not able to save themselves, nor can saints sanctify themselves.

Parenthesis: Is legalism the same as law keeping? In essence, the issue is not obedience to a standard as it is the motive for doing so. Obedience becomes legalism when an action is undertaken with the understanding that it will cause divine favor necessitating God to such an action that will bring personal benefit. Legalism is the belief that God can be motivated to an action He might not otherwise take for me if I do something that will necessitate His response. Obedience is not legalism when the motive is respect and gratitude for what God has already done. God cannot be coerced into benevolence. Such a thought is the essence of legalism.

The most fundamental, general question in the paragraph is, who is the “I,” “me,” and “my?” Paul uses it sixteen times in this passage. Is the “I” Paul in the unregenerate or regenerate state? The use of the present tense throughout the passage seems to suggest a current reality, whereas in 7:7-12 he used the past tense. Also, it is difficult to imagine an unbeliever with such a clear diagnosis of his/her state. Further, it seems true to Christian experience to struggle with sin. There are two “I’s” in this passage and there are two “I’s” in each of us, spiritual capacities, and fleshly appetites. F.F. Bruce stated, “In light of 8:7-8 it is difficult to view the speaker here [in v. 22] as no other than a believer.”

Note: To buttress his arguments Paul provided an autobiographical insight; accordingly, I sight a few observations to sustain his argument.

1. *The tense of the verbs is present indicating an ongoing action whereas in the previous verses they suggested a past action of some type.*
2. *The context of this passage within Paul’s argument in the book indicates that the topic is progressive sanctification.*
3. *The presence of the first-person singular nouns (“I”).*
4. *This approach is consistent with the fact that all believers struggle with sin. A line from an unnamed and untitled Methodist hymn says it well.
“And none, O Lord, has perfect rest,
For none is wholly free from sin;
And they who faint would serve Thee best
Are conscious most of wrong within.”*
5. *Paul turns to God in praise for Christ, something in Paul’s unregenerate state he did not and could not do.*
6. *The intense spiritual struggles pictured in this passage exist only within the heart and life of a believer. Paul described his pre-conversion experience as anything but struggles (self-confidence, self-complacency).*
7. *Paul’s longing for deliverance (v. 24) is consistent with the experience of redemption.*
8. *The assurance of triumph in v. 25a is something that only a Christian possesses (see 8:23).*

- a. His enslavement to indwelling sin, vv. 13-17

Parenthesis: Indwelling sin

The fruit of Adam's first sin resulted in the corruption of all the faculties of the soul (the rational, affectional, and directive faculties) within himself and Adam's kind. The extent of the corruption was universal though not absolute (we could still think, make choice, and do things). In the miracle of redemption, the blight on our faculties was not relieved but was weakened. Once the Bible describes the human condition as under the dominion of sin meaning that sinfulness controlled our thoughts, values, and choices. In redemption, the dominion of sin, the universal dominance of sin without exception, has ended, but the presence of sin has not. Every Christian has victory over some sins while they do not in some circumstances. The sin that remains in our nature, its dominion ended, is called indwelling sin.

1) A clarification, v. 13

The apostle offers a rhetorical question to answer a possible confusion. His point is that it was not the law that brought death (it being "holy, righteous, and good [v. 12]") to him; it was his sin that the law revealed.

2) The problem, v. 14

The problem for Paul was not the law, but himself.

He asserts that apart from the Spirit's power, he is a slave to indwelling sin (the remnants of sin's once universal reign in our lives). Verse 14 makes it clear that the responsibility to deal with the remnants is the believer.

3. The conflict, vv. 15-16

These verses describe the believer's conflict, the remains of sin's universal rule in our unsaved state. Says Newell, "Sold under sin' is exactly what the new convert does not know! Forgiven, justified, he knows himself to be: and he has the joy of it! But now to find an evil nature, of which he had never become conscious, and of which he thought himself fully rid, when he first believed, is a 'second lesson' which is often more bitter than the first—of guilt!"

a) The fact, v. 15

b) The consequence, v. 16

If one does what they know is wrong to do, they thereby affirm the law and judge their actions.

4) The cause, v. 17

The root of Paul's consternation is that fact that redemption does not cure human nature; sinful propensities remain in us.

b. His inability, an impotency, vv. 18-20

The emphasis in this section is on the positive side whereas in the previous it was negative. The "for" of verse 18 introduces the explanation and confirmation of verses 14-17. Paul is a divided person. Desire outdistances performance. "Flesh" means his unredeemed nature, not the physical body.

- 1) The fact, v. 18a
- 2) The evidence, v. 18b
- 3) The reason, v. 19
- 4) The conclusion, v. 20
- c. His perspective, vv. 21-25
 - 1) His realization, v. 21

From reflection on his religious experience, the apostle was gripped with the reality of conflict. His desires did not match his performance because of the remainders of indwelling sin.
 - 2) His discovery, v. 22

For the Jews, it was the Mosaic Code; for the Gentiles it was the witness of conscience, nature, and cultural morals. Knowing and doing are two, often, antithetical realities.
 - 3) His plight, v. 23

Paul's point is that the enemy within is greater than the renewed self. The fact of the new life alone is not sufficient for victory in the struggle with sin. The present tenses vividly portray the habitual struggle that ends in defeat.
 - 4) His cry, v. 24

Is this not the cry of all of us! Desire and performance often do not match. Simply put, Paul recognized that if he was in his mortal body, he would have conflict with indwelling sin and would be defeated in his own strength.
 - 5) His praise, v. 25a

Here is his answer, Jesus Christ our Lord. There will be a final victory and it will come with the resurrection of the body. Since Paul knows the answer, it seems highly unlikely that he has in mind his pre-redemption experience.
 - 6) His conclusion, v. 25b

This is Paul's resignation. He knows better than he can perform. That is clearly true for all of us experientially.

Applications:

1. It is evident from Paul's instructions that the role of the law to reveal inadequacy and liability to just judgment is the first step in the path toward the Savior, whether it be the Mosaic Code, the law written upon the conscience, or external natural revelation. All people know that something is askew whether they are willing to confront it or not. Though the law cannot save a person, it prepares a person to be saved by revealing his/her helplessness to meet God's righteous standard. Are you not glad that God did not leave you with the recognition of your emptiness, but filled you with the knowledge of Himself through Jesus Christ?
2. It is important to differentiate between legalism and obedience to rules. Law-obedient people are not necessarily legalistic; obedience to rules does not automatically make one a legalist. The issue between rightful obedience and unrighteous obedience is motive and

perception. If a person believes that conformity to divine law makes God indebted to them, you have a legalist. If a person believes that obedience makes God love you more or causes God to bless you more, you have a legalist. If a person obeys because God demands it as an act of gratitude and appreciation only, you have a non-legalist, but one who obeys.

3. We live in a culture of increased insensitivity to moral standards. In the name of political correctness and tolerance right and wrong has blurred with the loss of the differentiation between right and wrong, freedom and limitations. Wrong has lost its corporate value for individualized situational and personal choices (usually self-pleasure, obtainment of the desirable, and feeling good about oneself). Without law society, whether it be state, family, or church unravels. Is this not what we are seeing in our day. Democracies are fragile being dependent of the willingness to sacrifice personal wants for the corporate good. You and I are living in a world of litigation, tribalism, and anarchy. I think it is a great day to shine forth Christ in the darkness of emptiness.
4. Though we often hear from the pulpits of the Christian community that there is victory in Jesus, it is frequently stated in such a fashion that simply does not match our experience. While there is certainly wonderful changes that are brought through meeting Jesus Christ, while victory of sin's condemning power has been requited, the presence of sin has not. In fact, if our understanding the passage is correct, Paul is telling us that struggle with sin in our lives is normal. Redemption has handled the guilt and universal grip of sin, but it has not removed the present of it. How does this insight help you to understand the inconsistency in your life? How does it help you to sympathize with the weaknesses of others and not stand in cruel judgment over them? Don't we say, "People in glass houses should not throw stones."
5. The more I think and read about the spiritual life, the more I am convinced that growth in Christ is proportionate to dying to self. Selfishness, pride of place, and greed are common among us (if not revealed in ourselves, it is revealed in the fact that our desire to see others succeed is to see ourselves successful). How do we continue the task of dying to self, becoming more like Jesus? It is accomplished to some degree, not perfectly, by filling our mind with good thought and struggling to root our bad ones since we all act on our thoughts. Are you filling your mind with the thoughts of God or are you relying on management techniques? A Christian's victory over sin cannot be achieved by the strength of personal resolution.
6. Paul understood his sinfulness when he came to understand his motives. We can rationalize away our behavior, deluding ourselves that a wrong action was a right one, but you cannot fail to know your real motives. Apparent good with sullied motives is as sinful as poor action with poor motives. It is motives that opened the apostle's eyes. Do you justify your behavior at times by the benefit of the outcome of an action rather than the actual motive for it? God judges right and wrong based on motive first and action second. How do some of your "good" actions stack up when it comes to motive?
7. Paul ended the chapter with a marvelous insight for all of us as it relates to our struggles with sin. The solution is not through a look within, invoking strength of personal resolve not to do something any longer. It is not thinking well of yourself; that is psychological myth. The solution is not in looking outside of yourself to the wisdom of others. If problem-solving is not by looking within and summoning up internal fortitude or looking out for the

instruction of others, where is it? It is found in looking up, looking up to Christ, our redeemer. Paul ends the chapter looking up! “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord (7:25).” Could it be that you need to discover areas of your life where Jesus is not your Lord?