



BE TRANSFORMED

THIS HANDOUT

BEING TRANSFORMED BY THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS CHAPTER SEVEN



FAST FACTS

ROMANS CHAPTER 7

- Since Christians died in Holy Baptism, we are no longer bound to the Law.
- Christians should bear fruit - the fruit of the Spirit - to God.
- Awareness of sin arouses sinful passions.
- St. Paul cries that he cannot do the good he loves, and instead does the evil which he hates.
- Every Christian experiences a war between the law of his or her mind and the law of his or her members.
- Only Christ can deliver us "from this body of death."

ON THE CD

- GALATIANS 5
- A SPIRITUAL CHECKLIST
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ROMANS 7

In Romans 7:1 St. Paul explains precisely why Christians are no longer under the Law: "Do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives?" St. Paul is implying that, because Christians died in Holy Baptism, we are no longer subject to the Law.

St. Paul uses marriage as an analogy to explain this point. When a woman is married to a man, she is not free to leave her husband and marry another man (Romans 7:2-3). If her husband dies, however, she is longer tied to the dead man, but instead may now marry someone else. Christians are similarly no longer "married" to the Law: because we died in Baptism, we are now free to "marry" Christ (7:4).

St. Paul carries the marriage analogy to our relationship to Christ. Just as the people of God were once married to the Law, Christians are now married to Christ (Romans 7:4). Why, you might ask, are we married to Christ? St. Paul answers, so "that we should bear fruit to God" (7:4). Our sinful passions bear only the fruit of death (Romans 7:5; see James 1:15); Christians died to these things in Holy Baptism. Christians now have newness of life (Romans 6:4), a newness of the Spirit that enables us to bear the fruit of the Spirit.

It is easy to imagine someone who is dedicated to the Law objecting at this point: "Are you saying that the Law is sinful?" The problem is not with the Law itself, but instead with sin. The Law is "holy, and the commandment holy and just and good" (7:12), very effective in helping people to identify sin (7:7). Unfortunately, because we are sinful, merely *identifying* sin does not necessarily enable us to *avoid* it: instead, once we become aware of sin, we become tempted to engage in that sin (7:5, 8). St. Paul there-

PASSIONS

Overcoming the passions is one of the central foci of the Orthodox life. St. Maximos the Confessor defines passion as "an impulse of the soul contrary to nature, as in the case of mindless love or mindless hatred for someone or for some sensible thing." The passions are, for lack of a better term, our corrupt impulses; they are the lusts and emotions that turn our attention away from God and onto ourselves. Christ lists some of the passions: "From within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness" [Mark 7:22]. St. Peter of Damascus — using the Bible as his basis — creates a list of 298 passions, summarizing them as "a falling away from God in all things, utter destruction."

Archbishop Paul of Finland notes that passions arise from three sources:

First of all they are aroused by the outer world with its human relationships. A second source of passions is man's own corrupted nature, that 'other law in my members at war with the law of my mind' (Romans 7:23). It creates the lusts of the flesh, gluttony, drinking, laziness, etc. The third producer of passions is the soul's enemy, the tempter, the 'spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places' (Ephesians 6:12). That is where unbelief, despondency, pride, and especially blasphemy, come from.

The Orthodox emphasis on overcoming passions demonstrates another significant difference between Orthodoxy and the new American spirituality. Whereas a primary focus of the new American spirituality is general *ennui* and low self-esteem, Orthodox Christianity realizes that we must begin to address the evil within us — the problems we create — before we can progress spiritually.

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fore concludes, "The commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me" (7:10-11).

Because the Law is holy, it cannot itself lead to death. However, deceptive and powerful sin *does* lead to death. God gave the Law so that His people could know sin, and hate it for its sinfulness; the Law is intended to show how disgusting and repulsive - indeed, how "exceedingly sinful" - sin really is (Romans 7:13). St. Paul shows us that the Law taught him the "exceedingly sinful[ness]" of sin. He agrees with the Law that it is right and good (Romans 7:16), and yet he is unable to practice the good that is taught by the Law, and instead finds himself doing the sinful things he hates (7:15).

St. Paul's statement in Romans 7:16 is vitally important for understanding not only his teaching in Romans chapter seven, but also our life as Christians: "It is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me." It is important to understand that St. Paul is not saying that he as an individual does not sin. Fr. Lawrence Farley explains:

The point that he makes is simply that in sinning, he is not only false to God, he is also false to himself. The real Paul - the one made in the image of God, the one who sees sin with loathing and repents with tears - this Paul is as grieved over his sinfulness as God is... In his inmost self, he wants desperately to keep God's Law. But he sees a different law in his members, soldiering-against the law of his mind and taking him captive to the law of sin which is in his members.

This is the dilemma of every Christian. The "inward man," born in newness of life, delights in the Law of God (Romans 7:22). At the same time, because no good dwells in our physical bodies, we find ourselves practicing evil rather than the good preferred by our true Christian selves (7:18-20). The flesh (meaning the life of the senses) is a traitor, betraying - by submitting to temptation and sin - our desire to faithfully serve God.

Notice how St. Paul describes this dilemma: it is a *war* between the law of his mind (his knowledge of God and desire to follow His will) and the law of his physical members (his sinful passions) (Romans 7:23). It is for this reason that St. Paul - and every Christian with him - cries out, "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death" (7:24)? The situation, however, is not hopeless. There is One Who can save us from destruction: "I thank God - through Jesus Christ our Lord" (7:25)! St. Paul serves God with his mind, and his sinful passions with his body - Jesus, in the words of Fr. Lawrence Farley, "introduces a third principle and power into [St. Paul's] life: the law of the Spirit of life" (8:2).



LOVE GOD

The greatest commandment of God is, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37; Deuteronomy 6:5). St. Tikhon, an eighteenth century bishop of Zadonsk in Russia, teaches how you can determine if you love God more than yourself:

1. *God Himself indicates this, saying, "He that hath My commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me" (John 14:21). For the true lover of God will preserve himself from everything that is repugnant to God, and hastens to fulfill everything that is pleasing to God. Wherefore he keeps His holy commandments.*
2. *A manifest sign of love for God is a heartfelt gladness in God, for we rejoice in what we love.*
3. *The true lover of God disdains the world and all that is in the world, and strives toward God, his most beloved. He counts honor, glory, riches, and all the comforts of this world which the sons of this age seek, as nothing. For him only God, the uncreated and most beloved good, suffices. In Him alone he finds perfect honor, glory, riches and comfort.*
4. *The true lover of God keeps God ever in mind, and His love toward us and His benefactions.*
5. *One who loves, desires never to be separated from the one he loves... Likewise the true lover of Christ is he who abides with Christ in this world, and cleaves to Him in his heart, and uncomplainingly endures the cross with Him, and desires to be with Him inseparably in the age to come.*
6. *A sign of the love of God is love for neighbor. He who truly loves God also loves his neighbor.*



THE DANGER OF SLOTH

Lorenzo Scupoli, a sixteenth century Christian, warns against spiritual sloth:

Having once tasted the pleasure of inaction, you begin to like and prefer it to action. In satisfying this desire, you will little by little form a habit of inaction and laziness, in which the passions for doing nothing will possess you to such extent that you will cease even to see how incongruous and criminal it is; except perhaps when you weary of this laziness, and are again eager to take up your work. Then you will see with shame how negligent you have been and how many necessary works you have neglected, for the sake of the empty and useless 'doing what you like'.