

TRINITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

IHOP BIBLE STUDY

11 Romans 7: 7 – 25, “Sin and the Law” -- with commentary

The purpose of the Letter to the Romans is to develop a “Model for Living the Awakened/Transformed Life.” **Today’s study is the 11th of 27 lessons.**

According to our Study Chart we are studying the 2nd section of “Know The Relationship of Sin and The Law.” This is the second of two sessions in this lesson series.

Contextual Statement

According to our Study Chart, this is a third major section of our Romans’ chart. In this part of our lesson series Paul provides us with a discussion of the relationship of Sin and The Law as a struggle with the nature of Sin.

Read the assignment in one reading

Background: (The following is from *The Interpreter’s One-Volume Commentary of the Bible*. p. 782.)

Paul is arguing from what he has himself gone through, but his object is something more than autobiography.

On the other hand, we have here no stylized composition or rhetorical exercise. Paul is really writing about the **power of sin**—not objectively. . .or ethically. . .but in terms of **inner conflict** so threatening to the personality [*ed. “self” also the literal death of the self*] as to result in **utter despair, apart from Christ**. This is the true Christian experience interpreted by a man of supernormal intensity who had been disciplined in Judaism to the point of achieving the Jewish ideal [*blameless*], but in Christ was schooled to a complete transvaluation.

In the light of ch. 6 it would seem necessary to say that the experience of the believer as well as that of the nonbeliever is under survey. The paradox of Christian experience is that the power of sin is not broken after the first full response to the gospel (faith, conversion). The Christian is at the same time righteous and sinful, as Martin Luther said in a phrase both simple and profound. Righteousness, according to this letter, is real, not fictitious; but it does not amount to moral perfection or immunity from the downdrag of sin. **Indwelling sin** is not dislodged. There is internal tension so distressing as to be comparable to civil war (vs. 23), and on normal expectation this would be fatal (vs. 24). But the last word is with God, who is imparting his righteousness to man [*sic*] and will in the end reveal his [*sic*] mercy to all.

We grounded the word “sin” as separation, or the antithesis of what God at Perfect At-One-Ment wants for us. Also, the word “holy” is grounded as living the awakened life, the intended creation for humans.

WS: The IHOPers spent considerable time in grounding the colored/emboldened words above. This conversation was necessary to set the mood of Paul’s treatment of the experience of sin. As Paul states in vs. 24, this experience leads to wretchedness.

I. Carefully read vss. 7 through 12 and reflect on the following— It may be necessary to use all of the assigned verses to capture the significance of each question.

What is the Law of Sin?

WS: One IHOPer described the law of sin as a "maturing experience of disequilibrium." This is a good Gut Trip definition.

What is the role of The Law (the 10 Commandments)?

WS: Vs. 7 - The Law is not sin. Sin uses The Law to convict us. Vs. 12 -- The Law is Holy (whole, healthy) in and of itself. Vs. 7b - Without The Law there is no sin. Vs. 8 - Apart from The Law, sin is dead. The role of the 10 Commandments provides an ethical screen through which we judge how to live in covenant At-One-Ment. However, it is easily misused to create further separation between neighbor and self when applied legalistically.

What is the relationship between Sin and The Law?

WS: Sin and The Law are in a symbiotic relationship. They depend on each other for definition. Vs. 13 - The Commandments reveal to us that sin is really sin! This is not an intellectual exercise. Rather, our struggle is a civil war within us and the result leaves us in utter despair.

II. Vss. 13 -- What is the "death" produced in me because of Sin?

WS: The death we die is the literal death of the free self. The IHOPers had an extended conversation about being slaves to sin and/or slaves to God. Again, we picked up on Bonhoeffer's definition of The Responsible Person. **(See session # 10 of last week's discussion for an illustration of this principle.)** The experience is that The Responsible Person stands in the tension between appearing to others as either "irresponsible," or as "duty bound." However, the Responsible Person is the one who takes into consideration all of the various aspects and then seeks to do God's Will by making a Free Decision. It is this Free Decision that will appear to others as either being irresponsible or as duty bound.

This experience was grounded in a conversation about taking care of elderly parents. There comes a time when our elderly parents must be cared for as children. Our decisions are interpreted by them as irresponsible. However, as our friends may observe what we do it looks like we are duty bound

Finally, our decision to do whatever is necessary to properly and lovingly (tough love) is a Free Decision because the decision is made through WWJD. Because we have grounded Forgiveness in our decision, then our deeds are ultimately free and forgiven.

III. Carefully read vss. 14 through 20 and reflect on how The Law is spiritual and humans are so sinful. How deeply does this principle get applied in our lives?

WS: The purpose of The Law is to awaken us. I illustrated this point in a story about a sleepily early morning drive between Salina and Ellsworth, KS. This is an old narrow road with a 55 mph speed limit. The only other car I met that morning was a

Highway Patrolman who gave me a red light as he passed by. Now, I was fully awake. The Law had awakened me. This is the purpose of The Law. It serves us.

Paul's point is that we break The Law all of the time. In fact, breaking The Law is experienced as a power that I can not control. The experience of being out of control led to a conversation concerning "supernaturalism."

From the point of view of Gut Trip Analysis, supernaturalism has two fundamental problems. First, that supernaturalism finally leads to our victimization. For instance, at a football game, does God care who wins? One team is going to lose. Is this God's will? Not in Gut Trip Analysis. The second problem is that supernaturalism promotes a two-story universe when post-modern society lives in a UNI-VERSE. This leads to the experience of irrelevance because supernaturalism is not a meaningful explanation of the world in which we live. Gut Trip Analysis makes sense because it explains victimization and puts our decisions squarely on our own shoulders.

The uncontrollable power of Sin that Paul identifies is not a supernatural power. Rather, it is the experience of being fully human.

IV. Carefully read vss. 21 through 23 and reflect on the following --

A. In vs. 22 Paul writes, "For in my inner being I delight in God's law. But I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war, against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members." READ SOME COMMENTARIES TO SEE WHAT YOU CAN LEARN.

WS: Please see the commentary material at the start of this session.

B. What is Paul's conclusion about his state of being?

WS: Paul is imprisoned in his "inner being." He says, "I delight in God's Law, but he is victimized by another warring law that leads to wretchedness. This experience describes what Paul means by the Body of Death.

V. Carefully read vss. 24 and 25. What is the victory to be claimed? (Keep your answers Gut Trip, please.)

WS: My Gut Trip transliteration:

I am a pile of ashes. Is there any relief from this deep hopeless in which I find myself? Yes! An experience of profound relief awakens; this is a hope found in the middle of my despair. I am sustained and refreshed as a human being. This hope I've found in the example of the one who experienced death itself and was not defeated, and neither am I. I am awakened as the human being that I am created to be. This experience is associated with that of Jesus the Anointed/Savior of history.

Alright folks, talk to me.