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THE LOOKOUT

MARCH 2022

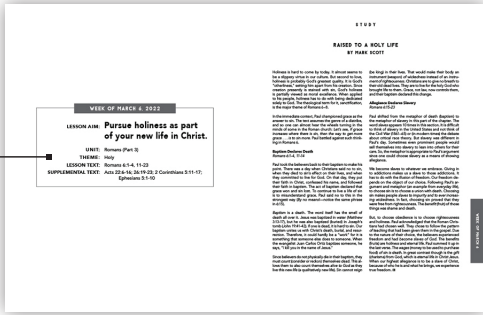
Unit: ROMANS (Part 3)

Theme: HOLY

Overview: The pace of our lives does not lend itself to taking “time to be holy.” God is righteous (Part 1) and has justified us in Christ (Part 2). God expects those who have been justified to live in holiness (Part 3). In these lessons, which close out our study of Romans, students will learn how baptism puts one on a path to holiness, how God’s law exposes unholiness, how the root of that holiness goes back to our spiritual ancestors, and how God’s people live out holiness in the context of sacrifice.

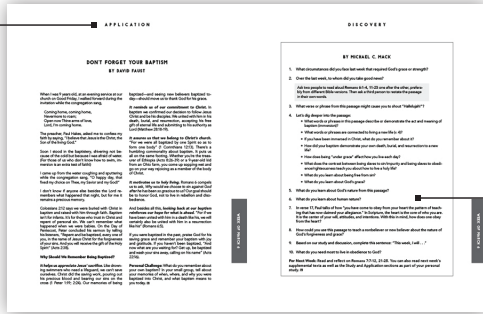
HOW TO USE

Each week has a lesson aim, supplemental text, and supplemental text.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: Study, Application, and Discovery.



Use the Discovery questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF MARCH 13, 2022

LESSON AIM: **Recognize your unholiness and ask the Lord to rescue you.**

UNIT: Romans (Part 3)

THEME: Holy

LESSON TEXT: Romans 7:7-12, 21-25

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Ezekiel 6:8-10; 20:42-44; Romans 7:1-6;
Galatians 3:10-22

THE HOLY COMMANDMENT EXPOSES MY UNHOLINESS!

BY MARK SCOTT

Adam was exposed (Genesis 3:9). Cain was exposed (Genesis 4:9). David was exposed (2 Samuel 12:7). Peter was exposed (Luke 22:61-62). John Mark was exposed—literally (Mark 14:51-52). All of us have been exposed (Hebrews 4:13). The Bible is like a mirror that exposes us—warts and all.

Paul continued his argument about sanctification in Romans 6–8. Remembering our baptism helps us live holy lives (Romans 6). The Holy Spirit helps us live holy lives (Romans 8). And staying close to the Bible helps us live holy lives—specifically by allowing its convicting power to wash over us.

The Holy Law Convicts

Romans 7:7-12

Paul used the example of marriage to make his point about the purpose of the law at the beginning of Romans 7. Marriage is binding upon a couple until the death of one's spouse. The purpose of the marriage contract is to keep the couple together. The same is true of the law in regard to its purpose for Christians.

The *law* (mentioned 12 times in our text and also called the commandment six times in this text) had a noble purpose—i.e., to help make us holy. There is no problem with the law. The law is *certainly not* sinful. It cannot be blamed for our unholiness. It did what God set out for it to do. It convicted people of sin.

Paul used the example of *coveting* (strongly desiring something that someone else has). Some scholars have suggested that this was Paul's affliction—but that is only a guess. "You shall not covet" is the final commandment of the 10 (Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21). Not knowing the commandment does not exonerate one from being guilty of breaking it. But when one is informed of breaking God's law, the only path forward is to be responsible with that conviction.

Sin seized (mentioned twice in the text, it means "took hold of") *the opportunity* to attack Paul at his weakest point. Even if Paul did not know he sinned, he still was guilty; but knowing he had sinned made his sin worse in a sense. Paul personified sin by saying sin sprang to life. This happened by listening to the law with its convicting power. The law was intended to make God's people holy. In the end, the law underlined their sinfulness.

The law had a redemptive side. There was nothing wrong with it. It remained *holy, righteous and good*. Exposure beckons responsibility.

The Law of Sin Wages War

Romans 7:21-25

One might be tempted to think that once the law brought its conviction to God's people they would be totally done with sin. That is wishful thinking, for the battle with sin will continue as long as God's people live or until Jesus returns.

Scholars differ about whether Paul was describing a reality in his life at the time of this book's writing or possibly a reality from his life before he met Christ. First-person descriptors (*I, my, and me*) occur 24 times in this text, and the present tense might seem to argue that Paul was describing a present struggle. But the grammar does not have to be understood that way. And would a "Christian" say that "good . . . does not dwell in me" (Romans 7:18)?

Regardless of the time period Paul was describing, the "law of sin" (in this case "law" does not mean the Old Testament law but the "principles drawn from experiences") waged war against his soul. Paul's desires were pure. He longed for the right thing (delighted *in God's law*). But heaven can fix some things we cannot fix in this world. Temptations will come while we exist in the flesh. In fact, sin can make a *prisoner* out of the finest of believers.

For Paul this meant his life was like a walking civil war. He was similar to a push-me/pull-me toy (i.e., a toy that wants to go in opposite directions at the same time). Paul self-diagnosed himself as *wretched* (afflicted or in suffering). The only one who can *rescue* and deliver is Jesus. Constant connection with Jesus helps us wage the war with sin.

Paul admitted to this ongoing war. His saved state in the realm of the mind of Christ submitted to God. But the flesh pulled him away from God. He found himself trapped and enslaved to sin. This was his reality. But a larger reality was when he delighted in God (Psalm 1:2; 119:16, 24, 27) he experienced no condemnation from God . . . and neither will we (Romans 8:1). Exposure can be a good thing so long as it drives us to God. ■

APPLICATION

LOOK AT THE RIGHT MIRROR

BY DAVID FAUST

Do you ever step into an elevator that has mirrored glass walls and feel surprised by the way you look? I see myself every day in the bathroom mirror at home, but in the changing room at the clothing store, things look different. Maybe it's the light or the angle of the glass, but a different mirror reveals aspects of my appearance I otherwise tend to overlook. *Have I put on a few pounds? Is my hair really that gray?*

It's good to take a fresh look at ourselves now and then, because most of us gravitate toward one of two extremes and see ourselves as either heroes or zeroes. Narcissists make themselves the center of attention. Others, who are self-effacing, mentally beat themselves up and constantly review their flaws.

In his book *The Self-Aware Leader*, John Maxwell points out that those who lack self-awareness don't realize how they come across to others. He recommends what he calls the Mirror Principle: "The first person we must examine is ourselves."

The Mirror of Truth

Like a mirror, Scripture reflects reality. How foolish it would be to gaze in a mirror and see dirt on your face, but instead of washing your face, you simply walk away and forget about the dirt! According to Jesus' brother, that's what it's like when we hear God's truth but don't practice it (James 1:22-24).

David modeled healthy self-awareness when he wrote, "Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23-24). Without defensiveness and with remarkable transparency, David invited the Lord to search his heart.

Likewise, Paul made himself vulnerable in Romans 7. Despite his best efforts, the great apostle admitted he often found himself doing the very things he hated! If you ever feel like a spiritual failure, remember this: One of the world's most influential Christian

leaders wrote, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?" (Romans 7:24). Aren't you glad Paul didn't stop with that verse? He went on to say, "Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (v. 25).

Many of us can identify with Paul's struggle described in Romans 7; the answer to those struggles isn't found in our own human efforts, but in the Spirit-filled life he described in Romans 8.

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). The Holy Spirit lives in us (v. 9), intercedes for us (v. 26), and makes us "more than conquerors" (v. 37).

If you base your self-image on what others think about you—or pamper your ego with an inflated sense of self-importance—you're looking at a contorted mirror. But if you want to develop healthy self-awareness, it's better to look in the clear, undistorted mirror of God's Word and heed the practical lessons found in Romans 7 and 8.

- *Don't pretend.* Be honest with God about your weaknesses and struggles.
- *Don't give up.* You aren't in the battle alone. God's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit will help you.
- *Don't despair.* You may not be a hero, but you aren't a zero. Despite your struggles and imperfections, nothing can separate you from the love of Christ (Romans 8:35-39).

Personal Challenge: In your personal journal or on a piece of paper, write your own "Romans 7." Be honest and vulnerable as you pour out your heart to the heavenly Father about your inner struggles and temptations. Then write your own "Romans 8," expressing gratitude for God's love and the power of his Holy Spirit, who gives you victory over sin and death. ■

DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. Over the past week, how did God provide you with what you needed to obey him?
2. How did it go last week when you sought to teach a nonbeliever or new believer about the nature of God's forgiveness and grace?

Ask two people to read aloud **Romans 7:7-12, 21-25** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to restate the passage in their own words.

3. What sentence or phrase from this passage stands out to you?
4. Let's dig deeper into the passage:
 - What is the relationship between sin and the law (commandment)?
 - What words or phrases did Paul use to characterize his struggle with sin and evil?
 - How did Paul view God's law in his heart?
 - How would you summarize the struggle between the desire to do good and the allurements of evil?
 - How would you summarize the solution to the struggle?
5. What do you learn about God from this passage?
6. What do you learn about yourself?
7. How does the choice to obey God help you when you experience spiritual warfare?
8. How can sharing your own struggles help you to share the good news with someone you know?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. Please answer one of these questions:
 - What do you want to thank God for?
 - What struggles do you anticipate in your life this week?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Romans 11:11-32**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■