

Romans 8:4-8, Part 4: The Theory of Free Will

Let us pray.

Romans 8:7 (ESV) For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile towards God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed it cannot.

You know that we have gone through Romans for about 7 months now. I like to remind everybody, from time to time, to step back and remember the doctrine by doctrine of Romans 1 thru 8.

Romans 1-3 Doctrine of Sin

Romans 4-5 Doctrine of Salvation

Romans 6-7 Doctrine of Sanctification

Did you catch that? Sin, Salvation, Sanctification? Yay for alliteration!

Anyways, all 7 chapters culminates into Romans 8 which is the Doctrine of Glorification or what some theologians call Perfected Salvation that is when we stand before Jesus Christ, we are perfectly saved as the psalmist so eloquently puts in in **Psalm 17:15 (ESV) As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness.** That is, not only will I be perfectly satisfied and content when I come face-to-face with God but will then God will have completed His work in me that only He was so faithful to complete it in the first place (**Philippians 1:6**).

But Paul is no fool when it comes to teaching. He has been hitting us with doctrine after doctrine before heading into glorification. However, in order to properly setup for us to feel the weight of glory that we will behold standing before God, Paul is going to cliff note Romans 1-7 in the first 2/3s of Romans 8. I don't have solid evidence that Holy Spirit did it for one reason or another but I think God was trying to avoid the whole attitude of, "I am saved, I live but the only thing I have to really look forward to is being with Christ." With that attitude, then you end up being like some end-

time nutjob holed up in the middle of nowhere in a bomb shelter with food rations and dehydrated water reading 1 Thessalonians and Revelations over and over again.

Dehydrated water, what?

So to properly know all about our growth in the likeness of Christ, we are tearing apart Romans 8 and especially for the last week, verses 7-8, on what that means to walk in the Spirit till we are completely saved to Christ in the end.

This week, we are expounding verse 7 and turning it around and asking the question, "So how do I submit to God's law?" or a better way would be, "So how do I submit to God?"

Before we dive into what submission, we have to unpack a couple of things. Just like with last week on worship, I want to avoid the ABCs of submission to lest you go, do the checklist and think you are good.

First thing we have to the false preconceptions that each of us has a free will or that we can do whatever we want to. That might be a nice feeling of power but that ain't in the Bible.

So lets start in the beginning with Genesis 3.

I. Believe it or not, we are all in submission or the myth of free will

Genesis 3:14-15 (ESV) The Lord God said to the serpent,

**"Because you have done this,
cursed are you above all livestock
and above all beasts of the field;
on your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life.**

**I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;**

**he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel."**

So from the word jump, God automatically deals with what needs to be dealt with first which is place Satan under submission. It is in this passage where God now puts Satan on a leash (Job 1:6-12). What many people who read this text don't realize is that dominion was given first to Adam (Genesis 1:26-28) but in the fall of mankind and the brokenness of all creation, dominion was now given over to Satan. God knows this so he curses not in order of blame but in the order of importance. Apostle John goes later on in his gospel, chapter 16, to say that the Holy Spirit convicts the world of three things, last of which the "ruler of this world is judged". So at the time when Jesus spoke this, whom was he referring to as the ruler of the world? Satan. What is intensely beautiful about the John 16 passage is that the past tense of the word "judged". In other words, Jesus goes ahead and declares His victory over death, hell, demons, sin and Satan to be so even though he has not died on the cross yet and subsequently, has not resurrected to champion over such things. Jesus declared it to be a done deal just like in Romans 8:30 when those whom He has predestined, He has called, He has justified and He has glorified. When God says it be done, it will be done.

So my question to you guys is, "Can Satan do what he wants to?". Obviously not.

Lets keep going:

Genesis 3:16 To the woman he said,

**"I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth children.
Your desire shall be for your husband,
and he shall rule over you."**

The thing I want you to get out of this is: "Can a woman eliminate the pain in her childbearing?" No.

Can the woman remove the desire, the want to master over her husbands? Can the man remove the desire to rule over her wife?

That means you have to go against your instincts with every single encounter and conflict in your marriage.

Keep going

Genesis 3:17-20 And to Adam he said,

**"Because you have listened to the voice of your wife
and have eaten of the tree
of which I commanded you,
'You shall not eat of it,'
cursed is the ground because of you;
in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.
By the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread,
till you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
for you are dust,
and to dust you shall return."**

*Can you uncurse the ground? Can you make work not seem like
toil? Can you not die?*

**Genesis 3:24 (ESV) He drove out the man, and at the east of
the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming
sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of
life.**

Can you return to Garden of Eden?

Later on in Romans 8, we will learn that God subjected all of creation to futility and not willingly. We know that animals don't have free wills per se but Romans 8:20 states that "the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it". So wouldn't "the creation" include us who are most definitely created beings according to Genesis 1:27?

I say all this to simply prove the fact that you and I are not truly

free to do what we want. Sure, we can go out and knock over a bunch of liquor stores but we are not going to spout wings and fly around. We might be able to race through the streets of Dallas but we cannot grow to nine feet tall. We can go do a bunch good things for other people but we cannot save ourselves to death.

That is part of the futility that all of creation is not willingly subjected to.

If all of creation is subjected to futility by God because of the Fall and our mortal bodies are subjected to death by God, then what does this all mean?

It means that we are utterly dependent upon the One who placed us under that submission in order to truly live.

II. We have to submit to God for our very lives

Remember when I said that the only real "freedom" we have the freedom to sin but not to save ourselves from futility? Let's check out:

James 4:1-4 (ESV) What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

I honestly think James gets a bad rap especially when it comes James 2 "faith without works is dead". The Protestant Reformer, Martin Luther, called it the "epistle of straw". But the more time I spend in Romans and in James, it seems to me that Paul or James is really playing off each other and they don't really contradict each other at all. So in verses 1 through 4, James essentially expounds the text over Romans 8:7 for us. Did he not? It is almost James

read what Paul wrote, which is more than like Galatians, and was like, "Oh snap, that's hot!" *scribble, scribble, scribble. There is some theologians who think that James had no influence from Paul's writings as they are self-contained which goes to show the work by the Holy Spirit. But I digress.

James is writing to his own church with their own set of problems. When we are truly exercising what "free will" we might have, we do the only thing we can do: sin. Look at verse 2. **We desire and do not have, so we kill for it.** Maybe not one another but how many times have you heard a man desiring a new wife so he is willing to kill his marriage. or that money will solve all of our problems, both present and future, we are allow to kill ourselves by working ourselves to death and kill our relationships with our spouses and our children and our friends. I don't think I have to tear through the verses 2 through 4 in order keep beating down this point.

So how do we get out of this supposed "freedom" we have?

James 4:5-10 Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"? But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

III. Submission does not begat God's grace but God's grace begat submission

At the surface level, it seems as though it should be easy enough to submit to God and He would bestow grace. But look at the order of the ideas in verses 5 through 10:

He yearns jealously - He foreknew you. He loved you before the earth was made. Therefore He pursues you and calls out to you and he will overwhelm you with His grace to where you can't resist.

When you have seen the most beautiful thing in the world, everything else in the universe is completely ugly. What is worse, you can't unsee what you have just seen.

It is only when God displays His fullness and grace to you is only when you would submit to Him. This happened to Paul who was a Christian murdering, violent opponent of Jesus Christ until Jesus Christ appeared to Him in His fullest splendor and asks, "Saul, why do you persecute me?" and the only thing Paul could respond with falling before Him, ask a silly question "Who are you..." but realizing the ignorance of that question and quickly acknowledges Him to be Almighty God who is Lord above all. This happened to Isaiah, who was just a wealthy noble, pretty much minding his own business and Jesus Christ appeared to Him in full splendor with angels all around Him. Jesus is so glorified that the sinless, perfect angels had to hide their eyes. Isaiah responds by crying out, "Woe is me! For I am lost and I am sinner among sinners. For I my eyes has seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"

Listen, I can beat Romans 3:10-12 into your head all the day long. You know it by heart. I know it by heart. But just in case we even fathom trying to argue against what Paul was saying when he says as he quotes David in Psalm 14 & 53 "No one is righteous, no, not even one", lets take a look one more time at verses 5-8:

Romans 8:5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.

Does the verse say, "Those who live according to the flesh can possible set their minds on the things of the Spirit?" Absolutely not.

Romans 8:6 For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

Does the verse say, "For to set the mind on the flesh can possibly have life and peace?" No.

Romans 8:7 For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.

Can the mind that is submitted to sin and set on sin, dead in our trespasses and sin submit to God's law? Romans states, "it cannot".

Some reason, it is taught in the majority of American churches that there is something intrinsically good within us that calls out to God, "Save us". But what started as a just a tiny little thought that God might have given us enough for us to make the decision to choose God versus death as evolved into a thought that perhaps, we are not all that bad. Or there is good people out there that God is going to save and either we break our backs trying to be that good. Some of us make it. Some of us go through life or at least give the rest of the world the impression that they are good folks.

For the rest of us like you and me, we give up. We can't do it. Something happens to us and we can't be that good because, I don't know, we don't want to work that hard or we feel as though the chips are stacked against us. We give up and just fall headlong into sin.

What about us who can't do anything possible to work that hard to be good? I guess we are all screwed.

Can that possibly be good news? Is that what Christ came to earth, to break His body and shed his blood so that the people who are just intrinsically good get to make it?

What is the reality of it all?

Here is what the scriptures say:

All have sin and fallen short of the glory of God.

That no one is righteous. No one seeks after Him. No one understands. No one does good. No, not even one.

We are dead in our sins and trespasses.

By our very nature, we children of the wrath of the Almighty God who created everything in the entire universe.

Fact is that dead men and women cannot possibly be asked to be saved.

Just like Ezekiel preached the Word of God, the Holy Spirit gave life to dry dead bones.

Just like Jesus preached out to Lazarus, "Hey friend... get out here!" and Lazarus is fully alive and comes out of the tomb.

Just like God called out to you and in His Word and His calling by the resurrecting power of the Holy Spirit, you are now fully alive. Before you were dead. Now, fully alive.

I know that I received mercy because there was nothing in me intrinsically good that was smart enough or wise enough to call out to God to save me but I know I had acted foolish and ignorantly in unbelief, and the beautiful grace of our Lord overflowed for me in the faith and love that is in Christ Jesus alone. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into this world to save all of us dead sinners, of whom I am the chief and foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, not that I did anything good, but because I was the foremost and chief of sinners, that Jesus Christ might display his perfect, tender, merciful, loving patience as an example, witness and a testimony to all of those who would believe in Him for eternal life.

That is truly good news. I hope and pray that this truth sinks into our hearts and let it take root. That the way we live our lives, engage with the world around us and love one other because nothing I can brag or boast about but because of what God has done to save me.

Let's pray.