

Dr. Craig Keener, Romans, Session 8

Romans 7:1-8:4

Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Study Guide, 4) Briefing Document, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Keener, Romans, Session 8, Romans 7:1-8:4, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Craig Keener's lecture on Romans 7:1-8:4 explains Paul's complex discussion of "the flesh" and its relationship to the law and the spirit. Keener clarifies that "the flesh" doesn't solely refer to the physical body but to human nature's inherent weakness and susceptibility to sin. He contrasts this with the transformative power of God's spirit, emphasizing that righteousness comes from faith in Christ, not adherence to the law alone. The lecture further examines Paul's use of rhetorical devices, including personification and hyperbole, to illustrate the limitations of relying solely on the law for spiritual liberation. Finally, Keener highlights the crucial distinction between the "mind of the flesh" and the "mind of the Spirit," underscoring the empowering role of God's spirit in achieving true spiritual transformation.

2. 18 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Keener, Romans, Session 8 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (New Testament → Pauline Epistles → Romans).



Keener_Romans_Session08.mp3

3. Briefing Document

Detailed Briefing Doc: Romans 7:1-8:4, Lecture by Dr. Craig Keener

This document summarizes the key themes, ideas, and facts presented in lecture 8 of Dr. Craig Keener's Romans series, specifically covering Romans 7:1-8:4.

Main Themes:

1. **Freedom from the Law:** Paul argues that believers are freed from the law through union with Christ, enabling a new life in the Spirit (Romans 7:1-6). This freedom allows for serving in newness of the spirit and bearing fruit for God.
2. **The Law and Sin:** While the law is good and reveals God's moral demands, it cannot transform the inner person. Left to our own devices, even with knowledge of the law, we remain vulnerable to sin.
3. **Life Under the Law vs. Life in the Spirit:** Romans 7:14-25 depicts the struggle of living under the law, marked by the inability to overcome sin despite knowing what is right. This contrasts sharply with the life in the Spirit described in chapter 8, where the spirit empowers believers to live righteously.
4. **The Flesh vs. the Spirit:** The "flesh" represents human weakness, vulnerability to sin, and a focus on earthly desires. The "Spirit" represents the power of God at work within believers, enabling transformation, life, and peace.

Important Ideas and Facts:

- **Understanding "Flesh":** While "flesh" (sarx) can sometimes simply refer to physical existence, it often carries connotations of human finiteness and susceptibility to sin. This is rooted in the Old Testament understanding of flesh as representing creatureliness and mortality.
- "The issue is not that the body itself is bad. The body can be used for good or for bad...But it can also be used in a bad way." (p.2)
- **The Law as a Tutor:** The law serves as a guide that reveals sin and points to the need for God's grace. It highlights our inability to achieve righteousness on our own, thereby preparing us for the gospel.
- "The law supports the gospel...The law teaches us the way of faith." (p.7)
- **The Superiority of the New Covenant:** The new covenant surpasses the old because it provides the indwelling Spirit of God, empowering believers to live

righteously from within. This contrasts with the external nature of the old covenant law.

- "The point is not that the old covenant is bad. The point is that the new covenant is greater." (p.7)
- **The Role of Faith:** True righteousness is not achieved through meticulous law-keeping, but received as a gift through faith in Jesus Christ. This new identity empowers believers to live righteously out of gratitude and a changed heart.
- "The difference is the difference between trying to achieve righteousness and receiving righteousness, because of what Christ has done for us." (p.16)
- **The Mind of the Flesh vs. The Mind of the Spirit:** Romans 8 introduces the concept of two contrasting mindsets: the "mind of the flesh" focused on earthly things and ultimately leading to death, and the "mind of the Spirit" focused on God, resulting in life and peace.
- "For those who live for their flesh live from the worldview of the flesh. But those whose lives are framed by the spirit have a way of thinking that's influenced by the spirit." (p.17)

Key Quotes:

- **Romans 7:4:** "But you, my brothers and sisters, also died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God."
- **Romans 7:12:** "So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good."
- **Romans 7:24-25a:** "Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"
- **Romans 8:2:** "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death."
- **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."

Conclusion:

Dr. Keener's lecture emphasizes the transformative power of the gospel, contrasting the futility of striving for righteousness under the law with the liberating experience of life in the Spirit. The indwelling Spirit empowers believers to overcome sin and live righteously, not out of obligation, but out of a new identity rooted in Christ. This understanding underscores the central message of Romans: justification by faith and the subsequent power to live a transformed life.

4. Romans Study Guide: Session 8, Romans 7:1-8:4

Romans 7:1-8:4 Study Guide

Key Terms Glossary

- **Sarx (Flesh):** The Greek word for flesh, often signifying human creatureliness, mortality, and vulnerability to sin. It can also describe outward existence or physical descent.
- **Soma (Body):** The Greek word for body. While not inherently bad, the body can be used for both good and evil.
- **Spirit:** In this context, refers primarily to the Spirit of God, which empowers believers to live righteously. Contrasted with "flesh" to highlight the difference between relying on human effort versus God's power.
- **Law:** Primarily refers to the Mosaic Law, the Torah. It highlights God's moral standards but is insufficient to transform humans inwardly.
- **New Covenant:** The covenant established by Jesus Christ, characterized by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the law written on believers' hearts.
- **Letter vs. Spirit:** A contrast between focusing solely on the literal interpretation of the law and understanding its deeper spiritual meaning and application through the Holy Spirit.
- **Passions:** Desires or urges that, when left unchecked and contrary to God's will, can lead to sin. In Romans 7, the focus is on coveting.
- **Yetzirah:** Hebrew for "impulse," often divided into good and evil impulses. Jewish thought emphasizes overcoming the evil Yetzirah through Torah study.
- **Kavanah:** Hebrew for "inwardness" or "intention," emphasizing the importance of sincere devotion and genuine heart change in religious practice.

Short-Answer Quiz

1. How does Paul connect the concept of "flesh" (*sarx*) to the "body" (*soma*) in his writings?
2. Explain the difference between "flesh" and "Spirit" as Paul uses these terms in Romans 8:4-9.
3. What is the significance of the analogy of marriage and widowhood in Romans 7:1-6?
4. How does Paul respond to the question, "Is the law sin?" in Romans 7?
5. Explain the contrast between "letter" and "spirit" as presented in Romans 7:6 and its connection to the new covenant.
6. What is the primary argument for understanding the "I" in Romans 7:14-25 as representing someone under the law, and not necessarily Paul's present experience?
7. How does the use of the present tense in Romans 7:14-25 contribute to the passage's rhetorical effect?
8. What is the function of Romans 7:15-25 within the larger argument of the book?
9. How does Paul use the concept of "passions" differently than some Greek philosophers?
10. What is the significance of the concluding statement in Romans 7:25a, "Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!"?

Short-Answer Quiz Answer Key

1. Paul links *sarx* and *soma* in verses like 1 Corinthians 6:16, where he uses them interchangeably while discussing sexual union. Other passages show the relationship between bodily members and the rule of the flesh, suggesting they are not inherently bad but can be misused.
2. Paul contrasts "flesh" with "Spirit" to distinguish between unredeemed humanity left to its own devices and those transformed by the indwelling Spirit of God. "Flesh" represents weakness, finitude, and vulnerability to sin, while "Spirit" signifies God's empowering presence enabling righteous living.
3. The analogy illustrates believers' freedom from the Law through their union with Christ. Just as a widow is released from her previous marriage bond through death, believers have died to the Law and are free to be united with Christ.

- 4.** Paul vehemently denies that the law is sin. He affirms the Torah's goodness but emphasizes its limitations. While it reveals God's will and restrains sin, it cannot inherently transform humans or grant the power to overcome sin.
- 5.** The "letter" represents a legalistic focus on the Law's literal interpretation, missing its deeper spiritual intent. The "spirit," empowered by the new covenant, allows understanding and fulfilling the Law through God's inner work. This echoes Jeremiah 31:33, where the Law is written on hearts.
- 6.** Several arguments support this view. The passage's present tense can be attributed to rhetorical vividness or speaking in another's persona. Contextually, Romans 6 and 8 depict freedom from sin and life in the Spirit, contrasting with the struggle described in chapter 7.
- 7.** The present tense creates a sense of immediacy and struggle, drawing the reader into the experience of someone battling sin under the Law. Whether this represents Paul's personal experience or a rhetorical device, it vividly portrays the inner conflict.
- 8.** This section highlights that even a law-informed mind struggles with sin when relying solely on human effort. It reinforces the need for the transformative power of the Spirit, setting the stage for the victory described in Romans 8.
- 9.** While some philosophers aimed to suppress all passions, Paul focuses on "coveting," desiring what God forbids. His understanding is rooted in the tenth commandment and aligns with Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, targeting the heart's desires.
- 10.** This exclamation marks a turning point. While chapter 7 ends in despair over the flesh's power, this statement anticipates the liberation found in Christ. It introduces the theme of victory over sin and death through the Spirit, developed further in Romans 8.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze the various ways Paul uses the term "flesh" (sarx) in Romans and its implications for understanding his theology of sin and human nature.
2. Discuss the role of the Law in Paul's argument in Romans. How does he view its relationship to the Gospel and the believer's life?
3. Examine the debate surrounding the identity of the "I" in Romans 7:14-25. What are the key arguments for and against interpreting this as Paul's personal experience?
4. Explain how the contrast between "letter" and "spirit" connects to Paul's understanding of the old and new covenants. What are the implications of this distinction for Christian living?
5. Compare and contrast Paul's view of overcoming "passions" with the perspectives of Greek and Jewish philosophers of his time. How does his approach differ, and what are the theological foundations for this difference?

5. FAQs on Keener, Romans, Session 8, Romans 7:1-8:4, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Romans 7:1-8:4 FAQ

What is the meaning of "flesh" (sarx) in Romans?

While "flesh" sometimes simply refers to physical existence, it often carries a deeper meaning in Paul's writings. It represents humanity's finite and vulnerable nature, susceptible to sin and temptation. This is contrasted with the "spirit," which represents the transforming power of God working within believers.

What is the significance of being freed from the law?

Paul uses the analogy of a widow being freed from her husband to illustrate our freedom from the law. Through Christ's death, believers are released from the old covenant and united with Christ in a new covenant. This allows us to bear fruit for God, no longer bound by the limitations of the law.

Does Paul believe the Old Covenant or Torah is bad?

No, Paul doesn't view the Old Covenant as bad, but rather as surpassed by the New Covenant. He emphasizes the New Covenant's greater power because it involves the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, enabling transformation from within.

Is Romans 7:14-25 describing Paul's current struggle with sin?

Scholars debate whether this passage refers to Paul's present or past experience. While some argue it depicts his current struggle, many believe it represents life under the law, highlighting the inability to achieve righteousness through self-effort.

Who is the "I" in Romans 7:14-25?

The identity of the "I" is another point of debate. Some suggest it refers to Adam, representing humanity's fall into sin. Others argue it personifies Israel, highlighting the nation's struggle under the law. Regardless, it represents a person under the law, striving for righteousness but ultimately failing.

What is the function of Romans 7:15-25 in the letter?

This passage demonstrates that even a biblically informed mind cannot defeat sin through its own strength. It contrasts with the pagan mind in Romans 1, showing that relying on the law alone leads to the same enslavement to passion.

What does Paul mean by "passions"?

Paul's use of "passions" is rooted in the Torah's command against coveting. He refers to desires for things that God deems harmful, highlighting the struggle between knowing what is right and being able to do it.

What is the solution to the problem presented in Romans 7?

Romans 8 presents the solution: the gift of righteousness in Jesus Christ. Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, believers receive a new identity and are empowered to live righteously, not to earn righteousness but as a result of God's transforming work within them.