

Dr. Craig Keener, Romans, Lecture 8, Romans 7 :1-8:4

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This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Romans. This is session number 8 on Romans 7:1-8:4.

Romans 7, like Romans 1, is one of those chapters that's less pleasant, but we're going to do our best with it.

Happily, Romans 7 is sandwiched between Romans 6 and Romans 8, and that's actually part of the point, not just in terms of mathematics, but in terms of the flow of thought in the book of Romans. But before we explore Romans chapter seven, we need to look at the meaning of the flesh. Although that term appears more in Romans 8, it's going to be helpful for background here.

Now, some scholars have really tried to avoid any connection between the flesh, *sarx*, and the body, *soma*. Unfortunately, Paul does connect them some. Some have argued, well, Judaism was very holistic and they didn't distinguish between soul and body.

Actually, sometimes they did in Judea and Galilee, but especially Diaspora Jews. They usually distinguished the soul and body following the Greek way of thinking. That's not to say that we have to follow that model, but if you look at the actual texts, Robert Gundry pointed this out in a book called *Soma*, meaning body, and it's been pointed out by some other scholars recently as well.

But in any case, 1 Corinthians 6:16, Paul says you become a man who sleeps with a prostitute, becomes one body with her. Then he quotes Genesis 2, which, including in his quote, says they become one flesh. So, *soma* and *sarx* there are used interchangeably.

Romans 7:5, passions and the members of the body are related to being in the flesh. Romans 8:13, death in the flesh is contrasted with the resurrection of the body by putting to death the body's works. Chapter 7, verses 23 and 25, bodily members are related to the rule of the flesh.

So, it's not saying that the body itself is bad. The body can be used for good or for bad. Romans 12:1, for you to present your body as a living sacrifice.

But it can also be used in a bad way. Romans 6:13 speaks of, don't present your body as members to sin, but present them as instruments of righteousness. Bad uses include in 1:24, defiling bodies sexually.

The old life in Adam is equated in 6:6 with the body of sin. Don't obey the desires of the mortal body, 6:12. 7:24, moral defeat related to the body of death. And you have something similar to that in 8.10 through 13.

The issue is bodily passions. However, it's not the body itself. We need our bodies.

And Paul is quite clear in 1 Corinthians 6 that our bodies will be raised. We will be judged, 2 Corinthians 5, according to the deeds done in our bodies. Paul, unlike Gnostics, has the Jewish view that goes back to creation, that when God created these things, it was good.

He created, if you believe in body and soul distinct, he created the body and soul both. They're both created and they're both good, but they have to be used for good. In any case, the issue is the bodily passions.

1:24, 6:12, 13:14, he cautions against the passions, warns against the passions. Now, there's a sense in which we need them for survival. They were created and they were created good.

We need hunger, so we'll eat, but we don't need gluttony. We need passion for procreation, so the species will continue. Humans need that just like other creatures do.

If there hadn't been those passions, the human race probably would have died out a long time ago. But the passions must not rule us. We must be ruled by what's right.

We must make choices based on what's right, not based on what we feel the urge to do physically. Those passions should be channeled in productive directions, like if you're married or eating healthily or whatever. Although the Bible does a lot more with sexuality than it does with food because it is a transgression of God's law to sleep with somebody that you're not married to.

But anyway, even the term flesh is not always used negatively, including by Paul. Paul in Galatians 2:20 speaks of the life that I live in the flesh. I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

Flesh often simply describes outward existence. Romans 1:3, Jesus, according to the flesh, was a descendant of David. In chapter 2:28, he speaks of circumcision in the flesh.

There's nothing wrong with that. Chapter 4:1, Abraham is our ancestor according to the flesh. Again, there's nothing wrong with that.

Chapter 9:3, Paul speaks of the Jewish people as his kin according to the flesh. Chapter 9:5, Christ was descended from the Jewish people according to the flesh, meaning physically, and genetically descended. 11:14, in some of these your translations may read differently, but I'm going with where it says sarx in Greek.

11:14, he speaks of his fellow Jewish people as my flesh. But where it becomes an issue, you have flesh versus the spirit in Romans 8:4-9. Now, this is not what some people were reacting against when they spoke of being holistic. This is not our flesh versus our spirit.

This is flesh versus the spirit of God. In the Old Testament, you have something like that in the book of Isaiah where the Egyptians are humans and not God, and their horses are flesh and not spirit. But especially in Genesis 6.3, which was a passage that was very often mined by Jewish people.

Genesis 6:3, where God says, my spirit will not always strive with humanity for they are but flesh, sarx. When the Old Testament, sarx in the Greek translation, if you're thinking of Hebrew, it's basar. But in the Old Testament, when it speaks of basar, or usually translated sarx in Greek, when it speaks of basar or flesh, it can be applied to humans, it can be applied to animals.

In either case, it's viewing this from the standpoint of our creatureliness and our mortality. Well, that gives the connotation of weakness and finiteness. It's not sinful in itself to be weak and finite.

We are finite. And when Jesus became flesh, obviously, he was still God. But he limited himself in some ways by becoming flesh.

That's why he says, it's good for you that I go to the Father, I'll send you the spirit. Because while he was with us physically, he could be with one of us at a time. Well, not one of us, but in one place at a time.

And so, when he goes to the Father, and the Spirit empowers us, then the work can be spread in multiple places at the same time. Well, in the Dead Sea Scrolls, they expand the semantic range of flesh. This weakness also includes vulnerability to sin.

And again, flesh is not inherently evil, in contrast to the views of many later Gnostics. But it's susceptible to sin, it's vulnerable to temptation. Paul's goal is not the annihilation of the flesh.

There were some Greek thinkers, but most of them didn't try to kill their flesh. Carneades and a few others may be exceptions. But for the most part, Greeks weren't trying to do away with their bodies.

They actually usually appreciated exercise. But what they were often envisioning, or many philosophers, especially in the Platonic tradition, believed that the soul was more important than the body. And that when the body died, the soul would rise up to the pure heavens.

Some of them went so far as to speak of soma sema, the body is a tomb. And so when you die, you escape from that, provided you've been cultivating your mind all along. Paul's goal is not that.

And Paul's goal is not definitely self-annihilation like you have in some ways of thinking, nirvana or something. It's not that the self is bad, it's that the self is finite, it's limited, and it's vulnerable to sin. So rather, it needs to be plugged into the larger purpose for which we were created.

Like in Romans 12, Paul speaks about yielding your body up to serve God. And ultimately, the context goes on, our body is used to serve his body. So, we have a larger purpose that we're plugged into, something infinite.

So, the contrast between flesh and spirit is the contrast between us left to ourselves, left to our passions, left to the best we can do on our own as weak mortal creatures, in contrast to what we are when God's spirit lives inside of us as new creatures in Christ. So, the contrast is between unregenerate humanity left to themselves and those who have the spirit of God. So again, the sense of what flesh is is particularly determined by the context, but it seems to always have this understanding of creatureliness, and the vulnerability idea flows from that.

Romans 7, verses 1-6, Paul speaks of us being freed from the law. In Jewish tradition, the Torah was God's daughter married to Israel, at least sometimes in Jewish tradition it was envisioned that way. Here, it's the other way around.

We're like a widow, we were married to the Torah, but when a widow's husband dies, the death ends the marriage. And it speaks here of the widow being freed from her husband. Jewish divorce law and Jewish law about widows use this kind of language.

The person is freed from their previous connection. Previously, they were tied to the other person, they were bound to the other person. Mishneh Gittin 9, when a person is divorced when a wife is divorced from her husband, it says that she's no longer bound to him, she's freed from him.

Paul uses that same language here. Sometimes in his writings, he uses that for divorce. Here, he uses it for widowhood.

That's going to be the point of his illustration. You can't, a wife, because polygamy wasn't officially illegal under Judean law at this point. Paul needs to use the illustration the right way.

But the wife, once she's freed from her husband, she's free to remarry. She's not free to remarry until she's freed from her husband. So, Paul is arguing, we've been united with Christ.

And for that to happen, we had to be freed from the Torah. It's an illustration. So, believers died to their previous union.

Now, presumably, we are the bride of Christ. That's made explicit in Ephesians 5:28 to 31. But you can see that Paul already thinks that way in 1 Corinthians 6:16 through 17, where he says that we shouldn't be joined to a prostitute because we've been joined to Christ.

Sexual intercourse makes you one flesh with somebody, but we have become one spirit with the Lord. So, we've been united with Christ. We are the bride of Christ, and we will be married to Christ.

Now, he speaks of this union, not as producing physical offspring, but as producing fruit for God, chapter 7 and verse 4. And he's going to use that language of fruit as he goes on as well. In verses 5 and 6, he says, we were in the flesh. It doesn't mean we were in the body, which is, you know, in Galatians 2:20, he says, the life I live in the flesh.

Well, there he's talking about being in the body. But he's not saying we used to be embodied, and now we're no longer in our bodies, because that's the kind of language he uses for the afterlife. That's the kind of language he uses for when you're dead.

And that's not something he's looking forward to. He's looking forward to the resurrection of the body, 2 Corinthians 5. But he says we were in the flesh. And when we were in the flesh, at that time, the passions aroused by the law worked in our bodies.

But now, having been freed from the law, we can serve in newness of the spirit. Once we were subject to the passions, they influenced us because we didn't have the spirit of God influencing us in a different way. We might have rules and regulations, but those very rules and regulations, the more detailed they became, the more they highlighted our contrary tendencies to go against those rules.

But when we depend on the spirit, it's not because we're trying to micromanage our morality or micromanage our thinking. It's that God invests his own activity within us

and transforms us from within. Now we've been freed from the law, he says, to serve in newness of the spirit.

We're still serving. Remember the language of being slaves in chapter 6. But no longer are we slaves to sin, but now we're slaves to righteousness. And here he says, we're slaves to God, as he also says in chapter 6 and verse 22.

The newness, we serve in newness. That recalls the new life in chapter 6 and verse 4. We have new life with Christ. In contrast to the oldness of the letter, he says, well, that's linked with the old life back in chapter 6 and verse 6, the *palaios anthropos*, the life in Adam.

And he contrasts the letter and the spirit. Well, rabbis could be so meticulous in the study of the Torah that sometimes they would focus even on minute issues of spelling. For instance, the *yetzir*, the impulse in Genesis 2:7, they noted, well, here we have a doubled yod.

And so, they tried to explain that in terms of what that meant. Maybe the two *yetzirs*, a good and evil *yetzir*, and so on. The letter, we can get very focused on the details and try to do it by something we can do with the text.

It's purely textually oriented. But the life of the spirit is more than that. Some people have read this as if Paul is against the old covenant, as if the old covenant was bad.

The point is not that the old covenant is bad. The point is that the new covenant is greater. You see that in 2 Corinthians 3, 6 through 8, especially 6 and 7. The new covenant is greater than the old covenant.

In *synkrisis*, or the rhetorical exercise of comparison, again, Paul may not have been thinking in terms of these kinds of labels for rhetorical exercises. But this was a common practice of comparing characters, comparing objects, virtues, and so on. You have this happen in the Old Testament too.

It's not strictly a Greek rhetorical device. But comparisons were not always between good and bad. Sometimes they're between something good and something better.

It's not that the old covenant was bad. It's that the new covenant is greater, and the new covenant has now taken us beyond the old covenant, not by meaning that the texts, we don't learn from them in the Old Testament. There are still principles there, but now there's a difference.

Jeremiah 31 talked about before with the old covenant, it's not like the covenant I made with your ancestors, which they broke, says the Lord, but rather with the new covenant, the law will be written in your hearts and in your minds. The Lord himself

will do this. And so, 2 Corinthians 3, blends that passage from Jeremiah with Ezekiel 36, verses 26 and 27, where God puts a new heart within his people, a new spirit within his people.

And God says I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my commandments. So, the difference between the old covenant and the new covenant is this new empowerment where God puts his spirit within us. And that's what we have here, the difference between letter and spirit.

2 Corinthians 3, it's very clear he even speaks of not with the old way of the laws written on tablets of stone, but rather it's written in the fleshly tables of our heart using Ezekiel's language and now by the spirit. So, in Romans chapter 7 and verse 6, he's not denigrating the old covenant. He's not denigrating the Torah, but he's saying that what we have now is greater than that.

And if all we had was that, we couldn't overcome sin. Even in the Old Testament, sometimes we read about the law being written in people's hearts. That was always God's ideal, but now we are empowered more widely to do that by the spirit of God.

And again, not that it didn't happen then, but it happens more now. Is the law sin? He's made this comparison. He said, we've been freed from sin, chapter 6. Then he talks about being freed by the law.

So, people ask the obvious question, the interlocutor says, well, is the law then sin? And his answer is may never be, God forbid. The Torah is good, he says in chapter 7, verses 12 and 14, but the law controls flesh rather than transforms. It limits sin.

It informs us about what's right and wrong, but by itself, without the activity of God's spirit, it doesn't transform us. It doesn't make us new. The law supports the gospel.

Paul said back in chapter 3 and verse 31, the law teaches us the way of faith. And then he went on to illustrate that in Romans 4 from Genesis 15:6. He's also going to deal with this in chapter 10, verses 6 through 8. He's going to make an analogy with the Torah, where the word is near you in your mouth and in your heart, quoting Deuteronomy chapter 30. And then Paul applied that to the message that we have now, the message of faith, that if that's in your mouth and in your heart, you'll be saved.

Well, in chapter 8 and verse 2, he's going to talk about how the law can be written in our hearts by the spirit, evoking Ezekiel 36. In these various passages in Romans, he emphasizes that we must approach the law by faith rather than by a standard for works. What can it teach us about a relationship with God? It can teach us about right and wrong, but what can it teach us about faith in God that empowers us? We need to trust in God rather than in the flesh.

So, you have that in 3.27, approaching the law as a law of faith rather than a law of boasting, a law of works. Chapter 9, verses 31 and 32 as well, which we'll come to later. Paul has some deliberately provocative statements.

Ancient rhetoric sometimes used shocking language for shock value to get people's attention. Jesus often does this following methods of Jewish teachers. There were some ways Jesus' teaching was very distinctive, but the use of shocking language, the use of hyperbole, graphic rhetorical overstatement, and so on, was fairly common among rabbis, maybe not to the extent that Jesus uses it.

But in using shock value, Paul is maintaining your attention. He can then qualify it. He uses some provocative statements, especially in Galatians, where he's really wanting to shock people.

He needs to get their attention. But we should not take those as his entire theology of the law and then say, okay, well, we play down the Old Testament or we end up with a canon within the canon. Although we do end up functionally with some parts of the canon as interpretive grids for what's around them.

I mean, you have that in the Old Testament as well. Genesis 33 and 34, in the context of the giving of the law, God reveals his nature to Moses. And we need to read the details in light of the heart of that.

And Jewish teachers recognize this. For example, when they cited the Shema, hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And then they went on, love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and might.

They saw that as kind of a summary of the Torah. You have other places where that's the case, where you have kind of a summary pulling together the heart of God's teaching. Jesus uses in Matthew 9:13 and 12:7, mercy more than sacrifice.

And you have that in Micah 6.8, where he says, what does the Lord require of you, O man, other than this? And he goes on with things that kind of summarize the heart of the law. Jesus does that with the law of love, loving God, and loving your neighbor as the heart, the summary of the principles of the law. This isn't meant to inhibit the inductive study of the Pentateuch, but it's certainly meant to remind us that academic knowledge of the Bible is not the same thing as the experience of God.

Because sometimes, and this can happen to seminarians, it can happen to professors, sometimes we get so focused on grammatical details, for example, that we miss the forest for the trees. We miss the heart of God. I sometimes illustrate this for my students this way.

And I need to do this because, of course, in our classes, we go into the details, but I want them to understand first and not miss the big picture. I saw the cat run. I, it's first person, personal pronoun, saw, the past tense verb for ocular sensation, the definite article, cat, felix domesticus, run, past tense verb for rapid locomotion, normally in our case, bipedal rapid locomotion.

Now, has that clarified the sentence? We can get so focused on details. Sometimes we miss the big picture. He speaks of life under the law in Romans 7. This is argued by many scholars but with good reason.

I mean, the law is mentioned 15 times in Romans 7:7 through 25. And I believe with many scholars that verses 5 and 6 of chapter 7 provide us an outline. We were in the flesh.

That's something that used to be true of us. When the passions were aroused by the law, but now verse 6, we've been freed from the law. We walk in newness of the spirit.

I believe Paul elaborates on what we were in the flesh in the rest of chapter 7 and elaborates on the newness of the Spirit in chapter 8. Now you say, well, but, in chapter 7, especially when you get to verses 14 through 25, it uses the present tense. And so, it must be describing Paul's current life. This is a matter of debate, especially in 7:14 through 25, more than in 7:7 through 13, because it does use the present tense.

But rhetorical elaboration could sometimes use the present tense to add vividness to something. You can think of what's traditionally been called the historical present in narrative, although it's usually not consistent, like Mark doesn't use it consistently. But in some more recent studies of the Greek verb, people sometimes speak in terms of aspect.

That is, sometimes you can use a decisive past tense, what we consider past tense, just to describe the action from the outside. Whereas the present tense, what we call the present tense, is sometimes used simply to view the action from the inside. And it makes it more vivid that way.

7:14 through 25 clearly depicts life under the law. And I don't know if you've ever felt like this, trying to achieve God's standard by our own effort. You know, as a scholar, I have this temptation to try to micromanage everything, try to control everything.

And when I try to do that with self-discipline, trying to control every detail of my own life, I get myself in trouble. I have a colleague who says he's OCD and I'm ADD. I actually literally am ADD.

But he says he's not really OCD, obsessive-compulsive disorder. He says he's really CDO because it has to be put in alphabetical order. But in any case, we can obsess over these details.

And if you're not OCD when you start, it can make you OCD. But God's way is not trying to micromanage everything ourselves, but God's way is trusting his Holy Spirit to be at work in us. It doesn't mean we don't practice self-discipline, but it means that we recognize that God is at work in us.

It's faith and not faith that you micromanage, but it's faith that grows in us because we see God's faithfulness. So, it depicts life under the law. That's true whether he's describing his present life or his past life.

As a Christian, I can approximate this somewhat, this kind of struggle, because I'm trying to make myself right before God instead of simply accepting what God has done for me in Christ. But the question of whether Paul here is speaking of his present life or life under the law, which is not the current life, has been the issue of debate. What's Paul addressing here? Is this Paul's present or his past or neither? Well, Paul's experience probably informs his presentation, but it's not necessarily limited to his own experience.

He's describing life under the law. He uses past tense verbs in 7:7-13, but present verbs in 7:14-25. Commentators are divided, although the majority of them doubt that Paul is speaking of his present state.

Many of the Roman, many of the Latin church fathers believed that this was Paul's current life, but the Greek church fathers usually believed that this was Paul's past life, or that Paul was speaking in the persona of someone else. The use of the present tense, speeches, and character, when you were doing *prosopopoeia*, that is, you were speaking in the voice of something or someone else, they varied the tense. Also, vivid descriptions in rhetoric, *ekphrasis*, you would normally use the present tense for a vivid description.

I mentioned what has traditionally been called historical presence, which may simply be viewing things from a more vivid standpoint within the action, an inside view. That's what Stanley Porter, Andrew Doss, and Mark Seyfried have argued with regard to the present tenses here. There's also some hyperbole here.

Even if you think it's present, and even if you think it's Paul's own life, which I don't think, but even if you think that, there's got to be some hyperbole. This person is incapable of doing anything right. It says, I'm completely enslaved.

I'm incapable of doing anything good. This is like what you have in 2:17 through 24, the hyperbolic caricature of this person who says, I keep the law, I love the law, I boast in the law, and you shouldn't commit adultery. Ah, but I do it.

You shouldn't worship idols. Ah, but I rob temples, and so on. This is extremely vivid, and this is not the way Paul would have thought about himself when he was under the law in terms of being able to do nothing right.

We see elsewhere that, like in Philippians 3, he says, you know, back then I thought my conscience was clear. I could boast about what I was doing. Well, who is the I here? Again, I do believe that it draws on Paul's own experience under the law, but I don't believe he's speaking just of himself.

Aethopopoeia was speech and character where you actually would imitate another person. Prosopopoeia, you could imitate something, like this could be the law speaking, or the virtue of love could be speaking, or something else could be speaking. It's a way of personifying, putting yourself in the persona of someone or something else.

Well, who is the persona here? Of those who say it's not Paul directly, one of the most common, and sometimes people will blend these as well, it's Paul, and this is that this refers to Adam because there are some illusions, possible illusions, that fit the description of Adam back in chapter 5 verses 12 through 21. So, this person is sinning like Adam. For instance, they're deceived, and that would seem to be an illusion to Eve.

The problem is that the term is used quite a lot in scripture. It's not by any means limited to Eve. And also, this doesn't fit 5:13, sin not being reckoned without the law.

Adam wasn't under the law in the technical sense, although he did have a commandment. So, some have argued that actually this is referring to those who are under the law, that the persona that Paul adopts is Israel. Douglas Moo argues this, and I think he makes a better case for that.

Sometimes in the Old Testament, Israel does speak corporately, as I, in certain Psalms places, and lamentations, sometimes in the Dead Sea Scrolls, in some community hymns, you have Israel as a whole speaking as I, or the remnant of Israel speaking as I. So, in any case, this is a person under the law. Is Paul currently under the law? Well, he said we were under the law, fleshly passions were at work in us, chapter 7 and verse 5. But in verse 6, remember, he says we've been freed from that, now we have new life in the Spirit. So, chances are, from the context, this has got to be depicting something different than certainly the ideal Christian life.

You contrast 7:14 with 6:18_20 and 22, chapter 8, and verse 9. The law, verse 14, is from the Spirit. I'm made of flesh, sold as a slave to sin. Well, to be sold as a slave, that's the opposite of being redeemed when you're freed, often by paying of a price.

6:18, having been liberated from sin, you become slaves to righteousness. 6:22, now that you've been liberated from sin and slaved to God, chapter 8, verse 9, you're not in the sphere of mere flesh, but in the sphere of the Spirit, since, in fact, God's Spirit lives in you. So, saying I'm fleshly, nothing good dwells in me, Romans 7, verses Romans 8, the Spirit of God dwells in me.

There's a decisive contrast with the context. We can look at some of these contrasts in more detail. Chapter 7, verses 7 through 13, the law, the sin, and death, and yet in the context we've been freed from the law, from sin, and from death.

I am fleshly. No, we're in the Spirit. The Spirit is in us.

No longer are we in the flesh. I've been sold as a slave to sin. Believers have been freed from enslavement to sin.

They're redeemed. Knowing what's right in the law without the ability to do right, 7:15 through 23. Well, you contrast power to live righteously in 8:4. It's not conferred by the external law in 8:3. You can also contrast 2:17 through 24, where this person talks a good talk, and says what's right, but doesn't live accordingly.

Sin dwells in and rules me, 7:17 through 20. The Spirit dwells in us in chapter 8. Nothing good dwells in me, 7:18, in contrast to the Spirit dwelling in us. The law of sin dominates his bodily members in contrast to believers being freed from the law of sin, 8:2. Sin wins the war and captures me as a prisoner, 7:23. Well, again, believers should win the spiritual war.

We have that language elsewhere in Paul. I want freedom from this body of death, this body destined for death, 7:24. Believers who don't live for their own bodily desires are freed from the way of death, in contrast to those who follow the flesh. A slave to the law of sin in his flesh versus his mind.

Well, chapter 8 and chapter 6, believers are freed from the law of sin and as believers we have the mental perspective that belongs to the Spirit as opposed to the mental perspective that belongs to the flesh. What is the function of 7:15 through 25 in Romans? Back in Romans 1 we have the pagan mind in Romans 1, the corrupted mind, the people who thought themselves wise but actually became foolish. It couldn't liberate them from passion and so they became increasingly enslaved to passion.

Well, you have the same thing in Romans 7, that even the biblically informed mind, even the law-informed mind can't defeat passion in its own strength. As long as we're depending just on ourselves, well, here's what I really want to do according to my passions, and here's what I, now that I know I'm rightly informed by the law, I know I shouldn't follow that passion but, you know, it's kind of a tug of war. I win sometimes, I lose sometimes, but ultimately I'm still a slave to the passion.

The law gives clear knowledge about God and his moral demands but it informs us, it doesn't transform us. The information does not by itself create righteousness. Now, again, if you're meditating on God's Word all the time, that certainly can help you to walk by the Spirit, but simply knowing information doesn't by itself set you free.

Contrast between passions and reason, we talked about that in Romans 1, which was a big deal for the Gentile philosophers, overcoming passion by reason. Different schools debated how. In fact, Stoics said that passion could be eradicated, which most schools didn't think.

Most schools thought, well, you need a kind of a middle way. Aristotle said, you know, you need a mean between excess on either side. But most philosophers agreed that it was irrational if you weren't able to master passion.

Some of them actually borrowed language from Greek dramatists, dramas about Medea and Phaedra, and others. They liked to take feminine images for those who couldn't control their passions. And please don't think that I am speaking here in a demeaning way of women, but I'm trying to explain simply how it was understood back then.

Philo of Alexandria, a Jewish philosopher, spoke of how the passions were feminine, the mind, and the reason were masculine. And when he wants to praise the empress, he says that she became almost male in her reasoning powers. He meant that as a compliment, but obviously, it doesn't speak too well of his view of women.

Well, in any case, where Paul speaks of the I in these terms, Paul is clearly not getting into that issue of feminine and masculine, that the passions are more feminine or something like that. But they took, like when Medea, Jason's wife, decides to marry somebody else. And so, she's going to get revenge on him by killing their mutual children, the children that she'd had with Jason.

And she says, I know this isn't right, but I can't help myself. And she's depicted as somebody who's overwhelmed by passion. Well, for Paul to depict a strict law observer in this way would be shocking because this is somebody, who is like a Gentile who's ruled by their passions, something that even philosophers said we shouldn't be like.

Some philosophers actually thought that normally to know what's right is to do what's right. And if you really understand what's right, you really do what's right. Paul doesn't say that it's not enough.

If it's just you by yourself, it's still flesh. Jewish philosophers, you have this in Philo, you have this in 4th Maccabees, and so on. Jewish intellectuals in the diaspora spoke of overcoming passion by reason, but not just in a general way like philosophers.

They said that that reason is enshrined for us in the Torah, in the law. So, if we meditate in the law, we will be able to overcome those passions. Judean thinkers spoke of the Yetzirah, you have it in the Dead Sea Scrolls and elsewhere, the evil impulse.

And the way you would overcome this evil impulse, Jewish, Judean thinking emphasized, was by the study of the Torah. The more you understood the Torah, the more you would have a Yetzirah, as the rabbis eventually emphasized, a good impulse that would overcome the evil impulse. Paul says, nice, but it didn't work.

The law limits sin, but it doesn't transform us. The difference is the difference between trying to achieve righteousness and receiving righteousness, because of what Christ has done for us. Now, when we're talking about controlling passions, what does that mean? Obviously, that doesn't mean that when a husband and wife are making love, they're supposed to control their passions.

And it doesn't mean that when we're thirsty, we shouldn't go get a drink. Sometimes Greek philosophers did, when they talked about passions, they sometimes meant any kind of bodily emotions, even. Stoics especially talked about extinguishing emotions, although they meant especially negative emotions, fear and anxiety, and so on, anger.

Now, Stoics sometimes had to confront the fact that it didn't always work for them. Like, you have this account, the eyewitness account of a Stoic philosopher. He's at sea during a storm, and he turns completely white with fear.

He's not saying anything. He's not shouting, but he's clearly afraid. And the sailors are laughing at him.

And so, this other intellectual on board the ship asks him, why did this happen? He said, well, you know, I haven't perfectly achieved this level of controlling emotion or destroying these kinds of emotions yet. Seneca tried to explain it in terms of kind of, you've got emotion and then you've got pre-emotion, and it's really the emotion you have to control. What initially arises within you, you can't stop it.

But as soon as your brain kicks in, well, as soon as your cognition kicks in and you can think about it, that's when you have to control it. And actually, modern studies of neuropsychology have shown that there are different parts of the brain. Certain things are processed before you have time to think about them.

And we are not cognitively responsible for those things. You have a certain kind of fear reaction, like you may hear a noise and jump, but it's like, oh, that's just fireworks. It's July 4th in the U.S. Or something like that, although I still jump every time.

My wife, who was a refugee during war, she jumps every time she hears it. Not everybody does, but we have these automated responses. But then, you know, that goes to that part of the brain first, and then we have time to process it and think about it, and then we can de-escalate the adrenaline and so on and calm down.

If we didn't have this kind of fear response, by the time we figured out that it was a lion getting ready to jump on us, I mean, the human race would have probably gone extinct a long time ago, right? So those are helpful to us. We have a lot of urges that way, but once we have time to stop and think about it, the Stoics said, we can suppress those things. Well, Paul is not out to suppress all emotion.

When Paul speaks of passion, the language that he uses to define it, he speaks of coveting in chapter 7 and verse 7. He specifies what he's talking about, and he's talking about what the Torah was talking about. Romans 7:7 quotes from Exodus 20 or Deuteronomy 5, the last of the Ten Commandments, you shall not covet. When the law says you shall not desire, what does the law mean by you shall not desire? Does it mean any kind of desire? That's how the Stoic philosophers may have taken it.

Don't desire anything and then you won't be disappointed if you don't get it. But for Paul, it's shaped by the Torah. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, your neighbor's property, and so on.

It's like taking the other Ten Commandments, you shall not steal, you shall not commit adultery, and go for the heart. Jesus does this in the Sermon on the Mount so that it's not just what you do, but who you are. And that's why Jesus says the law says you shall not kill.

Jesus says you shall not want to kill. The law says you shall not commit adultery. Jesus says you shall not want to commit adultery.

The language he uses there in Matthew 5:28 actually is the same Greek wording as you have from the Ten Commandments, the Greek translation of the Ten Commandments. You shall not lust means you shall not desire to have your

neighbor's wife for yourself. So, what he means by passion here, he uses the word passion, he also uses the word covet or covetousness or desire.

What he's referring to is desiring something that God says you shouldn't have, it's not good for you, it's not good for your neighbor. So, Stoics thought they could control that and Diaspora Jews and Judean teachers thought that it could be controlled. But normally if you would ask them, do you control this? They would say, well, no, I haven't achieved that yet, but this is how I can get there.

Well, Paul has a better way for us than that. I mean, you may be able to have some moral improvement. I mean, in practice, Paul isn't saying that those who kept the Torah were going out and acting the way he was describing in Romans 1 ordinarily.

I mean, it does control sin, but it doesn't transform us from the inside. So, he goes on to speak of the mind that's unable to control sin. The law-trained mind agrees with God's law, 7:22 and 23, and yet becomes a prisoner of the sin-stirring aspect of the law, he says in verse 23.

The law draws attention to sin. It's like if I tell you not to think of a pink elephant, what are you going to think of? Oh, look, you're thinking of a pink elephant. I told you not to think of that.

Paul uses also the language of a prisoner of war. Prisoners of war were normally slaves, yet Paul has said that we have been freed from slavery. The problem in Romans 7 is that we need more than information, not that information is bad.

Paul says the law is good. It teaches us right from wrong, but we need more than information. It may help us, but in Paul's hyperbolic way of presenting it, we're still enslaved to sin.

Only the gift of righteousness in Jesus Christ, only the new identity that he gives us is what makes us right before God, and it's that that enables us to live righteously, not in order to attain righteousness, but simply out of a new identity. Righteousness is a given, and so we live this way because God has made us new, and we dare, chapter 6 and verse 11, to actually believe that and live accordingly. So in verse 25a, he says, thanks be to God.

7:24, he says, who will free me from this body of death? Well, thanks be to God at the beginning of 7:25 seems to be the answer to that. Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ, our Lord. That's how he's been freed from sin.

And then he recounts the victory in chapter 8 verses 1 through 7. But first, he summarizes at the end of 7.25 that the mind wants to do right, but is still subject to the flesh. He spoke of that in 7:16, 7:22 and 7:23, the mind wanting to do right. But

as he summarizes at the end of 7:25, the mind wants to do right, but it's still subject to the flesh, which is going to introduce the theme of the mind of the flesh versus the mind of the spirit that we have in chapter 8. We begin to learn about the life of the spirit.

There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. Why? Because Christ has set us free, 7:25 in chapter 8 and verse 2. He's freed us from the law of sin and death. Instead, what we have working within us, it's not the law of death within our members, as Romans 7 talks about, but instead the law of the spirit of life.

The law is written in our hearts. Now that was always the ideal. Psalm 37 verse 31, 40 verse 8, Isaiah 51:7, the idea was always to have the law in our hearts.

But especially in Jeremiah 31.33 with the new covenant, the law is written in our hearts. As we mentioned earlier, Ezekiel 36.27, by the spirit is how this happens. I'll place my spirit within you and cause you to obey my laws.

We read about the spirit sometimes in the Old Testament, but remember Joel's prophecy, I'll pour out my spirit on all flesh. Your sons and daughters will prophesy and so on. This gift of the spirit is for the whole community.

All those who claim to follow God have God's spirit working within them explicitly and in a more open way. Paul explains the reason for this necessity in verses 3 and 4. The law couldn't transform us. The law couldn't deliver us from sin because the law was weak through the flesh.

That is, it depends on our ability to fulfill it. But God went beyond that. God delivered us from sin by sending his own son as a sin offering, most likely.

Sometimes it can be translated concerning sin. It's *peri hamartias*. So, concerning sin is literally how you could render it.

But in the Old Testament, often this phrase is used with respect to offerings. And so, God did it by sending his son concerning sin in the sense of as a sin offering. So, the righteous standard of the law, he says, is fulfilled in us because we can walk by the spirit rather than by the flesh.

And then he addresses the mind of the flesh and the mind of the spirit in verses 5 through 7. And this is my translation. I'm trying to capture the thought of it from the context and not just the individual words. 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. The fleshly frame of mind involves death. And ultimately, our mortal bodies are going to die anyway, if the Lord doesn't come back first.

But we have a different principle working within us if we are in the spirit that will ultimately resurrect us. The fleshly frame of mind involves death, but the spirit's frame of mind involves life and peace. Thus, the fleshly way of thinking is hostile against God, for it doesn't submit to God, and it's not even able to do so.

When he speaks of the fleshly mind, he recalls what he's just said back in chapter 7 verses 23 through 25. He's already said when he speaks here about the fleshly mind is not able to submit to God, it's at enmity with God. He's already spoken of us before our conversion.

We were enemies of God, but now we've been reconciled to him. He says here that the fleshly mind is death. Well, back in 7:24, he said, who will free me from this death-destined body? And in chapter 8 and verse 10, he's going to say, though your body remains destined for death, the spirit is life.

If all we have is flesh, if all we have is ourselves, and we don't have God at work in us, there's no hope of eternal life. We need God to give us that, and we need the empowerment of his spirit, so we have a foretaste of that eternal life, of that resurrection power already at work in us. When Jesus comes back, Philippians chapter 3 verses 19 through 21 actually talks about this.

You have those whose mind is just on their belly, which was a common way, Philo in particular, but a common philosophic way of speaking of those who were enslaved by their passions, ruled by their bodily desires. He speaks of those whose God is their belly. He also is going to speak of something like that in Romans 16:18 and 1 Corinthians 6:13, although in 6:13 he's specifically speaking in the context of sexual immorality.

But he speaks of those whose God is their belly, but he says it's different for us. Our citizenship is in heaven. He speaks in 3:19 of Philippians, those whose mind is set on earthly things, but our citizenship is in heaven.

And he goes on to say in verse 21, from there will come our Lord Jesus Christ, and when he comes, our mortal bodies will be transformed to be like his own glorious body. We'll receive bodies of glory. We'll be glorified at that time.

So here, when he's contrasting the fleshly mind and speaking of it involving death, this is a mind that's just, well, I live for today. That's what I've got. I live for this life.

That's what I've got. Whereas the mind of the Spirit gives us an eternal perspective and gives us God's perspective and God's heart, and we can live a different way because God lives inside of us. The fleshly mind, he says, is unable to fulfill God's law.

In chapter 8, in verse 2, the law of the spirit within us has freed us from the approach to the law that's an approach of condemnation. Chapter 8, verses 3 and 4, Christ bore our condemnation, so the law's righteousness is fulfilled in us by the spirit. There are actually some of these points where Paul's Jewish contemporaries would have agreed with him in some way, they would have disagreed with him.

They believed that we should rejoice in the law. We should rejoice in God's commandments. They also believed in *kavanah*, the inwardness.

Now, we're not always what we believe on paper, and Paul has been talking about that too, but what his contemporaries would have disagreed with, they would not have said that the spirit was widely available to empower us to do this. Remember, many of them, especially among the elite, among the teachers of the law, and among the political elite like the Sadducees, didn't believe the spirit was active in their day. Some of the common people believed that God would still raise up prophets.

Many of them followed people who claimed to be prophets. Of course, many of them followed Jesus, who actually was a prophet, and as we know, he's more than a prophet. But the outpouring of the Spirit was not something that especially the leaders and teachers expected would happen in their day.

You have it a bit different in the Dead Sea Scrolls where they speak of the spirit active among them, including in understanding the law, but even the Dead Sea Scrolls don't speak of the Spirit of God being active among God's people to the extent that we have in the New Testament with the outpouring of the Spirit and all of God's people being empowered to hear from God and speak for God. God's Spirit, as we'll see, testifies to our spirit that we're children of God. This goes way beyond anything Paul's contemporaries talked about as something happening in their own day.

And what that reminds us is we can, and I keep saying this, but I just want to make sure nobody misses the point. We study the Bible because we want to understand what God teaches us, but what the Bible points us to is a relationship with God, and it points us to the fact that God is the one who justifies us. God is the one who makes us right with him, and when he makes us right with him, God is the one working within us who empowers us to live in a new way.

So, we're not simply dependent on ourselves. We're trusting in God, both to make us right with him to begin with and to enable us to live like he's made us right. And we

will see more of that as we go on in Romans chapter eight, and we talk about the mind of the Spirit.

This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Romans. This is session number 8 on Romans 7:1-8:4.