

Dr. Craig Keener, Romans, Session 8,

Romans 7:1-8:4

6-min. Video Overview

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All right, welcome to The Explainer. Today we're going to jump into one of the most intense, and honestly, one of the most relatable chapters in the entire Bible, Romans 7. We're going to use the insights of scholar Dr. Craig Keener to help us unpack this incredible description of the war that happens inside all of us. I mean, let's be real, who hasn't felt this? This baffling, frustrating gap between what we want to be and what we actually do? The Apostle Paul just nails this feeling, and it really sets the stage for everything he's about to say.

So first up, let's talk about this war within. This isn't some kind of abstract theological debate for Paul. Nope.

He's getting right to the heart of a universal human problem, a struggle that is so profound it's going to need a really powerful solution. So according to Dr. Keener, Paul is describing a very specific state of being here: life under the law. Think of it as the experience of trying to be good, of trying to meet God's perfect standard, using nothing but your own willpower.

And as the chapter makes painfully clear, that's a recipe for total frustration. Okay, for our second point, we've got to decode a really key term that gets misunderstood all the time: the flesh. The Greek word is *sarx*, and if we don't get what Paul means by it, we're going to miss his entire point.

So the big question is, does flesh mean our physical body is bad or evil? You know, it's a super common assumption, but Dr. Keener is really clear that this is a total misreading. For Paul, creation, and that includes our bodies, is fundamentally good. Okay, so here's the game-changing insight.

Flesh isn't about your body being evil; it's about our creatureliness. It's a word that points to our human weakness, our limits, and our vulnerability, especially when we're left to our own devices. It's basically the human condition with no divine power up.

And you see how this just completely flips the script, right? The goal isn't to hate yourself or your body. The goal is to be honest about our limitations and to see that we need a power source that's way beyond what we can muster up on our own. All right, point number three, the good laws catch-22.

Now, Paul is insistent that the law itself is holy, righteous, and good, no question. But when we're trying to follow it in our own strength in the flesh, it has this bizarre paradoxical effect on us. Think of it like this: the law is like a perfect MRI machine.

It gives you a flawless, high-definition picture of the problem. It tells you exactly what's wrong. But here's the catch: the MRI machine can't perform the surgery.

It's a perfect diagnostic tool, but it has zero power to heal or transform. So this is the dilemma in a nutshell. The law is fantastic at revealing our failures, but then there's this weird twist.

As Dr. Keener points out, by telling you not to do something, it can actually make it more tempting. It's like someone telling you, whatever you do, don't think of a pink elephant. What's the first thing you do? The law gives us perfect information, but it doesn't give us a new nature.

And all this internal conflict, it just, it builds and builds until it reaches this breaking point, this desperate cry from the absolute bottom: Who will rescue me? And that question, right there, that's the pivot. That's the turning point for the entire argument. And it sets the stage perfectly for the answer.

And thankfully, Paul doesn't just leave us stuck in that despair. That cry for rescue leads directly to the solution. So section four is all about this new operating system, where we see this incredible pivot to the power of the Spirit in chapter eight.

I mean, just look at this contrast. It's literally night and day. It is a complete 180.

You go from being sold as a slave to sin to being set free. From nothing good dwells in me to the Spirit of God dwells in you, this is a total paradigm shift. And this, right here, is the absolute key to the whole thing.

The solution to the struggle isn't, okay, now grit your teeth and just try harder. No way. It's about a fundamental change.

It's about moving from relying on our own finite, broken-down engine to receiving a brand new power source from the inside out. And what this is really all about is the fulfillment of this ancient promise that you see in the Old Testament prophets: the new covenant. This is the idea that God's law is no longer just going to be some external code written on stone tablets.

Instead, it gets written on our hearts and His Spirit actually empowers us from within to live this new kind of life. Okay, so let's bring all this home. After this intense journey from despair to rescue, what's the big takeaway? What does life actually look like on the other side of this struggle? At the end of the day, does having the right information, even if it's a perfect law straight from God, not enough? Paul's whole point is to move us beyond simple rule keeping and into a dynamic living relationship with God, one where we actually get to experience His power at work in us.

So you see, this whole passage is about a fundamental shift in our entire operating system. It's about moving from trying to earn our way to God to receiving His goodness as a free gift, from relying only on ourselves to trusting His Spirit. We stop living out of that old, tired identity of failure, and we start living from a brand new identity of freedom in Christ.

And this really gets to the heart of it. If Romans 7 is the blow-by-blow description of the inner war, Romans 8 is the declaration that the victory has already been won. So the goal isn't to stay stuck in the trenches fighting that same battle over and over.

The goal is to learn how to live from this new reality, from a place of victory. And that's really the thought we want to leave you with. If that desperate struggle we see in Romans 7 isn't supposed to be the main story of our lives, then what does it actually look like day-to-day to start living from this new place of freedom and victory? What changes?