

Keener Romans Session08

Welcome back everyone. We're diving into some pretty deep waters today. Romans 7.1 to 8.4. Oh yeah, that's a big one.

A lot of folks find this section, well, a little confusing, honestly. Yeah, for sure. It's a passage that deals with sin and, you know, that struggle we all face, even as believers.

And we're going to be unpacking Dr. Craig Keener's lecture on it, which is, it's fascinating. He really digs into the meaning of flesh. Yeah.

And the whole idea of being free from the law. Like, what does that even mean? Exactly. And ultimately, Keener gets into the role of the Holy Spirit in all of this.

So, where should we start? Flesh seems like a good place, right? What's Keener's take on that? Yeah. Flesh is a, it's kind of a loaded word. A lot of people think it just means like our physical bodies or something, but Keener's got a, he's got a different perspective.

Okay. Yeah. I'm curious to hear this.

Right. So the Greek word there, it's sarx. And it's, it's more about our human limitations, you know, our tendency to, to sort of stray from God where we're kind of wired for it in a way.

Wired to stray from God. Well, yeah. It's like, we're, we're prone to making choices that aren't aligned with God's will.

And that's, that's the flesh at work. Okay. That makes sense.

So it's not just about like physical desires. No, it's, it's bigger than that. It's, it's our whole human nature, you know, body and mind.

Keener, he uses this example of hunger, you know, it's a basic need, right? Like we need to eat, but it can get twisted. Oh, I see. Like into gluttony.

Exactly. So the problem isn't the need itself, but how we fulfill it. Right.

Whether it's in line with what God wants or, or just what we want. Right. Right.

And, you know, it's interesting, Paul, he sometimes uses sarx interchangeably with soma. Soma. That's... The Greek word for body.

He even links them together in first Corinthians. Oh, right. When he's talking about, uh, I think sexual immorality.

Yeah, exactly. So it's not like our bodies are inherently evil, but, but they're part of that, that flesh that can lead us astray. So it's like our bodies aren't bad, but they're part of this bigger picture of our, our humanness that's prone to sin.

Yeah. And it's important to remember that flesh can also simply refer to our, our physical existence. Oh, like when Paul talks about Jesus being according to the flesh.

Exactly. It doesn't always have that, that negative connotation. It really depends on the context.

Okay. Context is key. So how does this whole idea of flesh connect to, to being free from the law, which Paul talks about in, in Romans 7, right? Yeah.

And this is where Keener gets into this, this really interesting analogy with marriage and widowhood. Wait, marriage and, and widowhood. Yeah.

See, Jewish tradition sometimes viewed the Torah, you know, the law as being like, like God's daughter married to Israel, but Paul, he kind of flips that on his head. So we were like married to the law. In a sense.

Yeah. But Paul's saying that as believers, we've died to the law, like we're widowed and now we're free to remarry. And who are we marrying? Christ.

Whoa. That's a powerful image. It is.

And Keener points out that, you know, in Jewish divorce and widowhood laws, they use this language of being freed from a previous bond, just like Paul uses in Romans. Oh, so there's that connection. So, okay.

So being freed from the law, it doesn't mean the law itself is bad or anything, but our, our relationship to it changes. You got it. We're not under its authority in the same way anymore.

And this is, this is really important to clarify, right? Because Keener keeps emphasizing that the law is good. Like Romans 7, I think, verses 12 and 14. Yeah.

They both say that outright. Right. The law is good.

It shows us God's character, his will. The problem is it can't change us on its own. So it's like, it can inform us, but it can't actually empower us to, to live it out.

Exactly. It's like, uh, think of it like a recipe. You can read all the ingredients, the steps, but it doesn't mean you can actually cook the dish, right? Okay.

Yeah. I get that. You need the skills, the experience to make it happen.

Right. And Keener even suggests that getting too caught up in the letter of the law, you know, all the rules and regulations, it can actually blind us to the spirit of it. Like missing the forests for the trees.

Yeah. Like he says, it's like dissecting a sentence grammatically. You might understand the parts of speech, but you miss the overall meaning.

Oh, that's a good analogy. Yeah. So how do we, how do we move from just dissecting the law to like actually experiencing it? Is that, is that where grace comes in? Well, grace is definitely part of it, but to really understand how it all fits together, I think we need to, we

need to tackle one of the most debated sections in Romans chapter seven verses seven through 25.

Oh boy. Yeah. That's, that's where Paul really gets into that struggle against sin.

And it sounds so personal, you know, like he's talking about his own experience. Yeah. And that's where you get a lot of debate among scholars about whether he's talking about his life before or after becoming a Christian.

Right. Right. So what does Keener say about that? Well, he acknowledges both sides.

Some think it's Paul's current struggle. Others think it's reflecting on his life before Christ, but Keener, he leans toward the idea that Paul's painting a picture of what it's like to live under the law, like in general, you know, for anyone. So he's using his own experience or maybe like a hypothetical person to make a point about, about the human condition as a whole.

Exactly. And he uses a lot of hyperbole, like, you know, exaggeration. To really drive the point home.

Exactly. He's saying, look, we are completely incapable of consistently doing what's right on our own. It kind of sounds hopeless, to be honest.

Well, that's where Keener asked this really interesting question. He says, if even a law abiding person, someone who's really trying their best, if they struggle this much, what hope is there for the rest of us if we're just relying on our own efforts? Okay. I see where this is going.

If trying harder isn't the answer, then what is? Well, that's the question that leads us right into the heart of Paul's message. Yeah. And that's the power of the Holy Spirit.

Okay. Now we're talking. But before we, before we jump into that, let's just, just recap really quickly what we've covered.

So flesh is our natural inclination to disobey God, not just our physical bodies. And we're free from the law, not because it's bad, but because our relationship with God has changed through Christ and the law, it's good, but it can't ultimately transform us because, well, because we're human, we're flawed. You got it.

All right. So that sets the stage for why the Holy Spirit is so important. So let's, let's get into that.

How does the Holy Spirit fit into all of this? All right. Well, that's what we're going to be looking at next. So yeah, picking up where we left off the whole idea of the Holy Spirit, it's kind of a game changer, you know, when it comes to this whole struggle with sin.

Yeah. Yeah, totally. I mean, we've established that simply trying harder to follow the law, it's not enough to overcome our weaknesses.

Nope, not even close. That's where the Holy Spirit comes in. Okay.

Yeah. So where does, where does Paul start talking about the spirit in Romans? Is it like right after that section in chapter seven, where he's describing that, that intense inner battle with sin? You got it. It's like right after all that heaviness, Paul just takes this, this dramatic turn in Romans 8.1. He comes out and says, there's no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Oh, wow. It's that's a huge shift, like going from feeling totally condemned to like complete freedom. Yeah.

It's like this, this giant weight being lifted. And Keener, he's quick to point out that this declaration of no condemnation, it's not about ignoring sin or pretending it doesn't exist. It's about experiencing real freedom from sin's power because of what Christ has done for us.

Okay. So it's not that we're suddenly perfect or anything, but that we're not held captive by sin anymore. That's a great way to put it.

It's like being released from a prison. We could never escape on our own. Oh, I love that.

Yeah. But how, how does that freedom actually play out in our lives? Like, does it just magically happen? That's where the law of the spirit of life comes in. Paul mentions it in Romans 8.2. And Keener explains that the spirit, he empowers us to actually live out God's will, you know, not just understand it intellectually.

So it's not just about knowing the rules, but having the power to actually follow them. Exactly. Remember how we were talking about the law being good, but not enough to transform us? Well, the spirit, that's the key to that transformation.

He helps us internalize the law, you know, like it's not just external rules anymore. It becomes like an internal compass. Yeah, something like that.

And Keener, he connects this to a passage in Ezekiel 36.27, where God promises to put his spirit within us and enable us to obey his laws. Wow. That's beautiful.

So it's not about mustering up more willpower or anything, but it's about tapping into this internal power source, the Holy Spirit. You got it. But then the question becomes, how does God actually do that? How does he empower us to live in a way that aligns with his will? Okay, yeah.

I'm curious to hear what Keener says about that. So in Romans 8.3, the four, Paul gives us an answer. He says that God has done what the law weakened by the flesh could not do.

See, God sent his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh, you know, as a sin offering. Is he talking about the sacrifices in the Old Testament? He is. And Keener thinks this imagery would have really resonated with Paul's Jewish audience.

You know, they were familiar with that whole sacrificial system. I'll be honest. I'm not as familiar with that part of the Old Testament.

Can you just give me a little background on that? Sure. So in the Old Testament, God commanded the Israelites to offer animal sacrifices as a way to atone for their sins. The animal's death, it kind of took the place of the person who had sinned.

Oh, so it was a way of acknowledging wrongdoing and seeking forgiveness. Exactly. And Keener suggests that Paul is using that imagery to explain how Jesus' death, it's like the ultimate sacrifice.

It deals with the sin problem once and for all. So instead of needing to constantly offer sacrifices, Jesus' death, it's the ultimate act of atonement. Precisely.

And because of that sacrifice, we're no longer condemned, you see. The righteous requirement of the law, that standard of perfect obedience, it's fulfilled in us through Christ. So it's not about earning our way to righteousness.

It's about receiving it as a gift. Exactly. That's a huge relief.

I know, right? And it totally changes the way we approach the Christian life. It's not about striving to be good enough. It's about surrendering to God's grace and allowing the Holy Spirit to transform us from the inside out.

Okay. Yeah. I'm starting to get a better grasp on this whole idea of grace and the Spirit's role in all of this.

But I'm also wondering, how do we know if we're actually walking according to the Spirit, like Paul says? Is there a way to tell? That's a great question. And it leads us right into the next section where Paul contrasts the mind of the flesh and the mind of the Spirit. It's in Romans 8.57. Keener, he suggests that we can think of these as two different worldviews, two different ways of approaching life.

Okay. I'm intrigued. Tell me more about these two mindsets.

Well, so, you know, those who live according to the flesh, Paul says, they have their minds set on the things of the flesh, like their focus is on immediate gratification, on satisfying their own desires, no matter the consequences. So it's a very self-centered way of living. You got it.

But then those who live according to the Spirit, they have their minds set on the things of the Spirit. They're seeking to align their thoughts, their desires, their actions with God's will. So it's about choosing to focus on what truly matters, on living in a way that honors God and brings lasting fulfillment.

Yes. It's about having a heart that desires what God desires, a mind that seeks his wisdom and a will that chooses to follow his leading. That makes sense.

And I'm guessing, like aligning our minds with the Spirit, that's where the transformation really starts to happen, right? Absolutely. Kina reminds us that this contrast between the fleshly mind and the spiritual mind, it connects back to what Paul was describing in Romans 7.23-25. Remember that feeling of being enslaved to sin, that inner conflict. Right.

Like wanting to do what's right, but constantly falling short. Exactly. So how does the Spirit help us overcome that? Well, Paul says the fleshly mind, it's hostile to God.

It refuses to submit to his authority. It's incapable of doing so on its own. It's like trying to fit a square peg into a round hole.

Like you said earlier, it just doesn't work. You got it. But the Spirit, he empowers us to live in a way that pleases God.

And it's not out of a sense of obligation. You know, it's out of a transformed heart. Okay.

So it's not about like gritting our teeth and forcing ourselves to be good. Yeah. But about allowing the Spirit to change our desires from within.

You got it. And you know what? Keener argues that this idea of the Spirit's transformative power, this would have been mind-blowing to Paul's Jewish contemporaries. Really? Why is that? I thought they believed in the Holy Spirit too.

They did. But they wouldn't have expected the Spirit to be so readily available to all believers, empowering them to live out God's will in such a radical way. So what changed? Why was there this sudden outpouring of the Spirit in the New Testament? Well, Keener, he points to the prophecy of Joel.

It talks about the Spirit being poured out on all people. Right, right. And he sees the events of Pentecost, where the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples as the fulfillment of that prophecy.

So it was like a pivotal moment in God's relationship with humanity. Absolutely. It marked a new era.

One where God's empowering presence wasn't limited to just a select few anymore, but available to everyone who believes. Wow. That changes everything.

It makes me wonder, though, if the Spirit is so readily available, why do we still struggle so much? Why do we still give in to those fleshly desires? That's a question we all wrestle with, isn't it? But before we go deeper into that, I'm curious, what are your initial thoughts? What stands out to you as we've been kind of unpacking this idea of the Spirit's power and the contrast between the fleshly and spiritual mind? Yeah. I mean, it's kind of overwhelming to think about this incredible power, this Holy Spirit being available to us, but I still mess up. I make choices that don't reflect that reality at all.

It's like, I know the right path, but I keep tripping and stumbling. Yeah. No, I hear you.

I think a lot of people feel that way. And it's important to acknowledge that the struggle is real. Even with the Spirit's help, we're still human.

We're still living in a world that's constantly pulling us away from God. So it's not about reaching this state of perfection where we never mess up again. No, not at all.

Keener, he actually warns against that kind of thinking. He says, studying the Bible, even diving deep like we are in Romans. It's not about gaining head knowledge or trying to become morally perfect.

It's about deepening our relationship with God, the one who offers us grace and empowers us to change. So it's more about the journey than the destination. It's an ongoing process.

Exactly. He uses this analogy of reading about a delicious meal versus actually tasting it. One is theoretical.

The other is it's an experience. And he wants us to experience the fullness of God's transforming power, not just read about it. Okay.

Yeah, that makes sense. But if we're not aiming for perfection, what does it actually look like to live in the power of the Spirit? How do we practically walk that out? Well, Keener highlights a few key things. First, it's recognizing that we can't do it on our own.

We need the Spirit's guidance, His conviction, His power every step of the way. So it's a constant surrender, a daily reliance on God's grace. Absolutely.

It's about acknowledging our weakness and leaning into God's strength. And as we do that, Keener says, we start to see the Spirit's work in our lives, not just in those big dramatic moments, but in the everyday choices that we make. So how do we recognize the Spirit's work? Are there signs, indicators? Well, Paul actually gives us a pretty helpful list in Galatians 5.22-23. It's what he calls the fruit of the Spirit.

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Oh yeah, right. The fruit of the Spirit.

Those qualities that can seem so, so hard to actually live out sometimes. They can be tough for sure. But yeah, if we're seeing those things growing in our lives, it's a pretty good sign that the Spirit's at work.

Okay. That's encouraging. And Keener, he points out that these fruits, they're not just for our benefit, right? They're meant to overflow into our relationships, to impact the world around us.

Exactly. It's not just about us becoming better people, but about becoming agents of God's grace in a world that desperately needs it. Wow, that's powerful.

So as we wrap up this deep dive into Romans 7 and 8, what's the key takeaway you hope our listener will grasp? I think Keener's main point is this. We don't have to stay trapped in that cycle of sin and defeat. God has made a way out through His Son, Jesus, and He empowers us to live a new life through the Holy Spirit.

It's not about striving for perfection, but about surrendering to God's grace and allowing Him to work in and through us. Yeah, that's such a good reminder. And I love how Keener connects all of this back to the historical context, reminding us that this outpouring of the Spirit was a radical shift.

Something Paul's Jewish contemporaries would have even imagined. It completely changes how we understand God's power and our ability to live according to His will. Well, thank you so much for joining us on this deep dive, everyone.

We hope this has been insightful and encouraging for you, and we'd love to hear your thoughts. What new questions or insights did this spark for you? Keep exploring this amazing truth and allow God to transform you from the inside out.