

Romans 7

O Wretched Man

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Romans 7: O Wretched Man

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This volume was compiled using the notes from a series of sermons through the book of Romans that Pastor Paul delivered to his congregation at Branch of Hope OPC in Torrance, California.

This section, titled *O Wretched Man*, is comprised of sermons on chapter seven of Romans.

At the end of each of his sermon notes, Pastor Paul has included a section of “Questions for Study and Meditation.”

We hope the reader will find these helpful in their study of and meditation on the Word of God.

Soli Deo Gloria

Romans 7:1-6

The Newness of the Spirit

October 27, 2013

Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to *her* husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of *her* husband. So then if, while *her* husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man. Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not *in* the oldness of the letter (Romans 7:1-6).

Introduction

Anyone who picks up a Bible and begins reading in the New Testament will draw the rapid conclusion that the Pharisees are the bad the guys. We comfort ourselves that we are not like them—hypocrites, self-righteous, desiring to have their good works seen by men, opportunists who take advantage of widows and don't care about the lost, etc.

With these things in mind, it appears an easy task when Jesus offers the exhortation:

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:20).

Yet one can also begin to make the argument that, as misguided as they were, the works of the Pharisees were quite impressive. They tithed **“mint and dill and cumin” (Matthew 23:23)**. The last stat I heard was that currently only 5% of Christians in the West tithe. Not only did the Pharisee tithe on his income, he tithed on the growth of his spices. My wife bought a plant for our kitchen that, as it turns out, is an herb she uses in her cooking. I have never once measured its growth to tithe on the increase.

Jesus chastised the Pharisees because they did **“all their deeds to be seen by others” (Matthew 23:5)**. Of course this indicates that they were doing deeds. They weren't too busy to show up for the ministries of their church. They **“loved the place of honor at feasts” (Matthew 23:6)** from which we can extract that they were at all the potlucks. These Pharisees would **“travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte” (Matthew 23:15)** whereas the modern Christian can't seem to find the gumption to invite their neighbor to church. We see yet another backhanded compliment from the mouth of Christ when He chastises the Jews with the words: **“You search the Scriptures” (John 5:39)**. In other words, they read their Bibles, went to studies, regularly attended church, etc.

These Pharisees had gold stars on almost every category on the poster in their Sunday (Saturday) School classroom. Yet we are told that our righteousness must exceed theirs! How do we comfort ourselves in this race for righteousness that, at least at some level, we seem to be losing to the Pharisee? We generally ignore the backhanded compliment and focus on the criticisms (of which there are many), seemingly summed up with Christ's words:

**So you also outwardly appear righteous to others,
but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness
(Matthew 23:28).**

So we console ourselves with the notion that we have a righteousness that lies *within*—an imputed righteousness—the righteousness which is not our **“own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith” (Philippians 3:9)**. And I certainly hope that it is *that* righteousness of which Jesus speaks when He tells us our righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees (although it is not

rapidly apparent by the context).¹ I say this because, at the risk of sounding self-deprecating, it certainly appears that endemic to modern western Christianity is just the opposite of the problem that the Pharisees had—we outwardly appear unrighteous, but we comfort ourselves with the notion that within we are full of sincerity and obedience.

We don't tithe like the Pharisees; we don't do deeds like the Pharisees; we don't interact with the brethren like the Pharisees; we don't evangelize like the Pharisees; and we don't study the Bible like the Pharisees. And yet, we nonetheless think we have a righteousness that exceeds theirs!? Is that the way it's supposed to work? Is that what it means to **“serve in the newness of the Spirit?”** Should the spiritual man be the one who has no gold stars on the poster board in his Sunday School classroom??

Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives (Romans 7:1)?

The Dominion of the Law

There is no doubt that the Pharisees were missing something critical to their own soul's well-being. When Jesus chastised them for tithing yet neglecting the **“weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness” (Matthew 23:23)**, He certainly wasn't merely raising the bar of the requisite righteousness for entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven. One can easily make the argument, looking at the whole of the gospel and the whole of Scripture, that Jesus was seeking to bring their hearts to an awareness of aspects of the law that would reveal to them their own spiritual death, as it had done to the Apostle Paul (Romans 7:8-11). True and deep considerations of justice, mercy and faithfulness will, no doubt, leave us desperate for help.

Paul is teaching here that the law has dominion *kurieuei* over a man. The law is man's master. To what law is Paul referring? Roman law? Ceremonial law? The context indicates the moral law

¹ Since in Matthew 5:21 through the end of the chapter He launches into a list of behaviors that He seems to feel need addressing.

of God (Romans 7:7).² But whether it is the moral law summarily comprehended in the Ten Commandments, natural law (which would be the same as the Ten Commandments, only skewed by sin), pagan law, the law of false gods, etc., the conclusion remains the same—that law is a master. And as a master it will make demands, but will in no way enable obedience or offer deliverance. It is like a bad, bad marriage—being married to a smart, but cold, heartless, despotic, demanding tyrant! As the Apostle illustrates:

For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to *her* husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of *her* husband. So then if, while *her* husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man (Romans 7:2, 3).

If Her Husband Dies

This metaphor is both simple and complicated at the same time. First, it should not be taken in such a way as to encourage wives to kill their husbands. Secondly, it is not an exhaustive treatise on justifiable divorce and remarriage. If you observe it closely it doesn't entirely go step-for-step with Paul's point. In a moment we'll read that we, as Christians, have become "**dead to the law.**" But in the metaphor, it is the law that dies. So we see that it is a bit complicated if we try to push the metaphor too far. Paul's point though is simple—death dissolves a relationship and the obligations thereof. Paul continues:

Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God (Romans 7:4).

² Specifically, coveting.

Put to Death

Here we read that it is the Christian who has **“become dead.”** Literally what Paul is saying is that the Christian was **“put to death”** *ethanatothete*, since it is in the passive. Not to push too far, but it is not a spiritual suicide as much as it is a sort of cosmic homicide by the grace of God. God saw that we were in a bad marriage with a demanding task master who could only promise death. The table was set for the marriage supper of death—but the death was assumed by Christ—Paul writes that we became dead **“through the body of Christ.”**

Paul appears to be repeating and building upon something he wrote earlier:

Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4).

We have been made dead to the law, but we don't just remain dead. We have been made dead to the law through the body of Christ, and *why?* That we **“may be married to another.”**

Married to Another

Some of you may recall that one of the unintended consequences of the Reformation was the un-tethered madness (at least in the minds of some—including Luther) of the Anabaptists. They were free from Rome and became like teenagers on Spring Break.

Going back to Paul's metaphor, the woman whose husband dies does not remain some kind of swinging widow. She marries another. She marries **“Him who was raised from the dead.”** She is no longer married to a task master, but to one whose **“yoke is easy...and burden is light” (Matthew 11:30)**. She will marry the one who is truly the provider; the One who by His own death has ensured His bride's sanctification, cleansing and washing—a husband who will not fail (who has not failed) to make certain that His bride will be presented **“without spot or wrinkle.”** That she **“might be**

holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:27, 28). This might be a good time to ask yourself if this includes you. I am not sure it can be asked much better or made much clearer than the third question of our membership vows:

Do you confess that because of your sinfulness you abhor and humble yourself before God, that you repent of your sin, and that you trust for salvation not in yourself but in Jesus Christ alone?

Now the fourth question is meaningless apart from an affirmative answer to the third.

Do you acknowledge Jesus Christ as your sovereign Lord, and do you promise that, in reliance on the grace of God, you will serve him with all that is in you, forsake the world, resist the devil, put to death your sinful deeds and desires, and lead a godly life?

It is this fourth question which is a longer way of addressing how Paul ends this verse we are looking at. We have been wed to the risen Christ, why? **“That we should bear fruit to God.”** This is the great contrast to those who have not yet called upon the Name of the Lord:

For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death (Romans 7:5).

Aroused by the Law

Here we observe a very brief thesis of fallen human nature—**“in the flesh”** *en te sarki*. When it gets right down to it, the law of God (being an extension of the character and nature of God) is something that the natural mind has hostility *echthra* (Romans 8:7) toward:

Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be (Romans 8:7).

A mere system of ethics (as perfect as it may be and something which many people want from a religion) simply doesn't work. We see that it does at least two things revealed in this chapter: It arouses the natural man's sinful passions because of the fallen sinner's natural enmity toward God; and it makes our sinfulness all that more apparent. As Paul teaches:

Has then what is good (the law) become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful (Romans 7:13—parenthesis mine).

Put simply, the law reveals sin for what it is—rebellion against God—the wages of which are death (Romans 6:23).

Fruit to Death

And this is all the fruit which leads to death, or as written: **“to bear fruit to death.”** A life which displays no repentance, which lives in unchecked rebellion, is a life that is not life at all. A man should observe his own life—his own heart—and if he sees rebellion against the God who made Him and that God's wise commands, he should view that as toe-tag of his own death. But in this life there is hope. By faith in Christ the shackles of death can be loosed and he can enjoy the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:9).

But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not *in* the oldness of the letter (Romans 7:6).

Delivered from the Law

Paul begins the final section with the words **“But now”** *nuni de*, indicating his heading toward his main point (or at least one main point). The Christian has been **“delivered”** *katergethemen* (again, in the passive) from that awful marriage—**“having died to what we were held by”** *kateichometha* (literally *held down by*—controlled and constrained). That old master (what Paul calls the **“oldness of the letter”**) is a religion reduced to externalism—going back to the Pharisees, something at which they were quite excellent. But if I can put it in simple terms, they had not taken their faith to heart. Or, as Jesus taught:

This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me (Matthew 15:8).

I certainly pray that these words aren’t descriptive of us.

Newness of the Spirit

Christians are now called to serve in the **“newness of the Spirit.”** What should be obvious to all is that the serving in the newness of the Spirit should not be inferior to serving in the oldness of the letter. The Pharisee should not out-study, out-obey, out-serve or out-love the Christian. For various reasons the newness of the Spirit has come to mean, to many Christians, a free-wheeling, impulse-driven life and ethics. But to serve in the newness of the Spirit is not an alteration in the ethics or law of God. Calvin taught it well:

...for as far as God has in the ten commandments taught what is just and right, and given directions for guiding our life, no abrogation of the law is to be dreamt of; for the will of God must stand the same forever.³

Or, as Jesus taught:

³ Calvin, J. (1998). *Romans* (electronic ed.). Calvin’s Commentaries (Ro 7:2). Albany, OR: Ages Software.

Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled (Matthew 5:17, 18).

To serve in the newness of the Spirit it is a change of husband; it is to serve as one who has been married to another. Think of the wife who runs her household—who does good and not evil, works with her hands, buys and prepares food, acts industriously, aids the poor, raises the children and watches over the ways of her household—only to dread the sound of the door opening and the callous and ruthless greeting of a husband who will never be satisfied at her greatest efforts—who provides nothing in her heart to aid toward her virtue.

To serve in the newness of the Spirit is not a change of ethics; it's a change of heart, to serve with the knowledge that we are not grasping for a straw of approval from a reluctant God who will never be satisfied with our inept efforts at righteousness. But we are serving a God who loves us and sent His Son to ransom us. There is nothing we can do to make Him love us more than He does. And our service, our obedience and our love should reflect that we are just beginning to understand that.

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. How were the works of the Pharisees impressive? Provide a summary of Christ's criticism of the Pharisees.
2. In what way do you think your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the Pharisee? Are there any ways that it doesn't? What critical element were the Pharisees missing?
3. In what way can the law of God be a cruel master?
4. What is Paul's point in the metaphor of the marriage in verses 2 and 3?
5. What does it mean to be dead to the law? How does that happen to a person?
6. When the marriage to the law ends, what marriage begins? What is the difference between the two husbands? To whom are you wed?
7. What is the natural man's response to God and His law? What is meant by *fruit to death*?
8. Does deliverance from the law mean God's ethics change for the Christian? What is the difference between serving in the oldness of the letter and the newness of the Spirit?

Romans 7:7-12

I Am Holy, Just and Good—Who Am I?

November 3, 2013

What shall we say then? *Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, “You shall not covet.” But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead. I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me. Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good (Romans 7:7-12).*

Introduction

A number of years ago a lady in our church came to me moderately distressed regarding a conversation her young daughter had with her grandmother (the lady’s mother). The granddaughter had shared with her grandmother that our church periodically recites the Ten Commandments during the worship service. The grandmother told her young granddaughter that she wished she didn’t attend our church—*because the Ten Commandments aren’t for today’s Christian.*

On another occasion, after preaching a sermon which included the call to be obedient to the law of God, a young couple approached me with their Bibles opened and forcefully, yet respectfully, questioned whether it was appropriate for me, as a New Covenant pastor, to call Christians to obey the law. Their Bibles were opened to Romans 10:4, which reads:

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes (Romans 10:4).

In class in one of the seminaries I attended we were asked to give a paper and oral presentation on sanctification and spiritual formation. In brief, I shared that Christians are justified/saved by grace through faith alone; then, by that same grace the Spirit works in our hearts to conform us into the image of Christ through a renewed appreciation of the law of God—inclining our hearts to obedience. I thought this was simple, boiler-plate Christianity. But as I looked up I was confronted with bewildered faces. The professor, seeking to assuage the confusion and discomfort asked me, “Are you Reformed?” The question caught me off guard. I did not realize that the desire to obey God’s law was a Reformed distinctive.

Once, a fellow pastor asked me what I was preaching on. At the time I was preaching through the Ten Commandments. An awkward silence followed after I told him this. Pressing to find out why the silence, he communicated to me his resistance to use the word “Law.” He viewed the commandments more as guiding principles.

Even within Reformed circles (I mention *Reformed* because of its commitment, in my opinion, to doctrinal priority and integrity) we see the law of God (at least as it is summarily comprehended in the Ten Commandments⁴), either attacked or strongly deemphasized.

A recent candidate for the ministry revealed during his exam on the floor of our presbytery that he had embraced this de-emphasis.⁵ He was given a hypothetical ministerial situation where a neighbor approached him to ask for wisdom about how to be a better husband. Specifically, the question was, “Where would you go as a resource to answer your neighbor’s question?” The candidate answered the question with a question. “Is the neighbor a Christian?” The presbyter asking the question replied, “I don’t know, I just made him up. Does it matter?” The candidate had been taught in seminary that the law of God, found in the Bible, may not be the best source of ethics to present to the non-Christian.

This anti law or antinomian rhetoric goes on and on. And its consequences are disastrous. *I am holy, just and good—who am I?*

What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For

⁴ See question 98 of the Westminster Larger Catechism.

⁵ This is seen, more or less, in a doctrine popularly known as *Two Kingdom*.

I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, “*You shall not covet*” (Romans 7:8).

Is the Law Sin?

Reading Romans 7:8, it appears that Paul was confronted with the same mistaken hostility toward the law of God. Why else would he rhetorically ask, “**Is the law sin?**” It is certainly understandable, given the Apostle’s numerous negative statements about the law of God (he had just written that the law arouses “**sinful passions**”—that Christians are “**dead to the law**” and “**delivered from the law**” [Romans 7:4-6]). A cursory reading would lead one to send the law of God packing in its totality. But we have to keep reading.

Because in all of these negative statements about the law, we will come to realize that the problem isn’t the law at all. Paul is about to teach that the “**law is spiritual**” (Romans 7:14), that the law “**is good**” (Romans 7:16), that he “**delights in the law**” (Romans 7:22) and that with his mind he “**serves the law**” (Romans 7:25). At least in one respect, Paul seems to be a big fan of the law! That is, no doubt, why he wrote:

Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully (1 Timothy 1:8).

Is the law sin? Paul offers his strong objection “**Certainly not!**” or “**may it never be!**” *me genoito*. He then begins to offer his testimony of how the law worked aggressively and graciously in his own life.

The Law—Provider of Valuable Information

Paul “**would not have known sin except through the law.**” The law poked Paul right in the shoulder and called him a sinner! That’s not always an easy message to hear. When I was a kid back in the sixties I had a buddy named Doug. He wasn’t very big, but he was the toughest guy I knew. A Bible-thumping Jesus “freak” (they used to call them) tried to witness to Doug. Part of the presentation included telling Doug he was a sinner. Doug didn’t like hearing that. So Doug punched the Jesus freak and knocked him out.

Paul mentions coveting (the Tenth Commandment) as the particular law that did him in. This is not readily apparent in the accounts of Paul's conversion experience in Acts 9 and 22. We think of Paul being knocked down, blinded and confronted by Christ. But wrapped up in that encounter was an epiphany. The light went on for Paul in that confrontation. The law, which Paul had been no doubt taught since he was a youth, did its work. He came to see his own covetous *epithymian* heart.

To covet means to strongly desire something that belongs to someone else. Its root is a lack of contentment with the provision of God. Why was it the sin of coveting that did Paul in? Some suggest it is because coveting is the first sin which leads to all sins. Others think it is because coveting is entirely an inward sin. We can go all our lives without actually murdering someone in obedience to the Sixth Commandment (though Jesus taught otherwise) and think we've kept it. This cannot happen with coveting. Self-righteousness is a difficult disposition to hold onto when coveting enters the room.

Paul then enters into some interesting dialogue.

But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all *manner of evil* desire. For apart from the law sin *was* dead (Romans 7:8).

Sin—The Opportunist

So the law is like a light going on in a den of debauchery. And the light does at least two things revealed in the present portion of the text. One, as Paul had taught in verse five, it arouses “**sinful passions.**” The den of human debauchery works more efficiently in its rebellion because it enjoys that which is clearly forbidden.

Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant (Proverbs 9:17).

This is why promoting the law of God, apart from the gospel of Christ, will never remedy human corruption. Of course, simply because people are hostile to the law of God is no reason to sweep it off the street and into the church narthex. People, after all, will often have the same response to Jesus.

And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed (John 3:19, 20).

Verse twenty in the above passage shows us another valuable work of the law—our sinful deeds are exposed; or, as Paul had written earlier:

For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin (Romans 3:20).

There are other good uses of the law which are not addressed in this passage, suffice it to say for now that **“apart from the law sin was dead.”** This I take to mean that until the law has its work, that sin lurks silently in the thoughts of deeds of fallen men—as if it doesn’t exist at all.

Paul’s testimony continues:

I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died (Romans 7:9).

I Was Alive

I remember, as a young man, thinking I was a pretty good athlete. Then one day I found myself in a four-on-four basketball game with five members of the NBA. I felt they had been imported from outer space—as if we weren’t even members of the same species. I was an athlete once without the NBA, but when the NBA showed up, my athletic incompetence revived and I was (or should have been) benched.

Clearly, Paul in this passage is speaking in spiritual terms. He viewed himself as alive until the law revealed he was a coveter, then that lurking sin which had appeared non-existent became all too obvious. Sin revealed its fangs in Paul’s throat—more aptly, *in his heart*. His own spiritual death was made manifest.

One wonders if this sentence was easy for Paul to write. As one who was “**caught up into paradise**” (2 Corinthians 12:3), beholding, as it were, the glory of God—life in its fullness—this may have been an understatement. If bumping elbows with NBA athletes revealed to me that I was no athlete, how much more would beholding the glory and holiness of God reveal to Paul the width of that great chasm between true life and true death!

And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me (Romans 7:10, 11).

The Great Discovery

There are numerous passages in the Scripture which may lead a Bible student like Paul to the conclusion that the commandment was to bring life:

You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the Lord (Leviticus 18:5).

I gave them my statutes and made known to them my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live (Ezekiel 20:11).

But the children rebelled against me. They did not walk in my statutes and were not careful to obey my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live; they profaned my Sabbaths (Ezekiel 20:21).

And this is not merely in the Old Covenant. Paul was no doubt familiar with Jesus’ interaction with a certain lawyer.

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your

heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live” (Luke 10:25-28).

Paul interacts quite a bit with the notion of living by the law or the commandments (e.g. Romans 10:5). But perhaps most thoroughly in the third chapter of Galatians, where he writes:

For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.” Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.” But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.” Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”—so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith (Galatians 3:10-14).

When it comes to be justified or made righteous before a holy God—when it comes to the eternal pardon—those who **“rely on the works of the law are under a curse”** for **“cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.”** The standard is not mere sin-less-ness, as if doing nothing can find favor before God; it also includes actively doing all things written in the Book of the Law.

Paul had been living under the grand delusion that he **“as to righteousness under the law”** was **“blameless” (Philippians 3:6)**. It is true, whether we read in the Old Testament or New Testament, that if we keep the law in its fullness and to perfection, we shall live—God’s law is that righteous! As Calvin taught:

Foolishly, then, do some reject as an absurdity the statement, that if a man fulfils the Law he attains to

righteousness; for the defect does not arise from the doctrine of the Law, but from the infirmity of men, as is plain from another testimony given by Paul. (Rom. 8:3.) We must observe, however, that salvation is not to be expected from the Law unless its precepts be in every respect complied with; for life is not promised to one who shall have done this thing, or that thing, but, by the plural word, full obedience is required of us.⁶

Those who shall live by the law is an empty set. But this is no indictment against the law. Paul completes the thought by referring to the law with three adjectives generally reserved for God Himself.

Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good (Romans 7:12).

The law is “**holy**” *hagia*, “**just**” *dikaia* and “**good**” *agathe*. When it comes to being justified before a holy God, the law serves as an MRI, revealing the great disease of sin for which the blood of Christ is the only cure. This, however, does not mean that the law has no other value or that it should be dismissed. On the contrary, since the law is of such great value in this and other aspects of human concern⁷ it should ever be before us.

⁶ Calvin, J., & Bingham, C. W. (2010). *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses Arranged in the Form of a Harmony* (Le 18:5). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

⁷ This is worth quoting in length:

Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 19:5, 6, 7:

5. *The moral law doth for ever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof; (Rom. 13:8, 9, Eph. 6:2, 1 John 2:3–4, 7–8) and that, not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator, who gave it. (James 2:10, 11) Neither doth Christ, in the Gospel, any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation. (Matt. 5:17–19, James 2:8, Rom. 3:31)*

6. *Although true believers be not under the law, as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified, or condemned; (Rom. 6:14, Gal. 2:16, Gal. 3:13, Gal. 4:4–5, Acts 13:39, Rom. 8:1) yet is it of great use to them, as well as to others; in that, as a rule of life informing them of the will of God, and their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly; (Rom. 7:12, 22, 25, Ps. 119:4–6, 1 Cor. 7:19, Gal. 5:14, 16, 18–23) discovering also the sinful pollutions of their nature, hearts, and lives; (Rom.*

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb (Psalm 19:7-10).

7:7, Rom. 3:20) so as, examining themselves thereby, they may come to further conviction of, humiliation for, and hatred against sin, (James 1:23–25, Rom. 7:9, 14, 24) together with a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ, and the perfection of His obedience. (Gal. 3:24, Rom. 7:24, Rom. 8:3–4) It is likewise of use to the regenerate, to restrain their corruptions, in that it forbids sin: (James 2:11, Ps. 119:101, 104, 128) and the threatenings of it serve to shew what even their sins deserve; and what afflictions, in this life, they may expect for them, although freed from the curse thereof threatened in the law. (Ezra 9:13–14, Ps. 89:30–34) The promises of it, in like manner, shew them God's approbation of obedience, and what blessings they may expect upon the performance thereof: (Lev. 26:1–14, 2 Cor. 6:16, Eph. 6:2–3, Ps. 37:11, Matt. 5:5, Ps. 19:11) although not as due to them by the law as a covenant of works. (Gal. 2:16, Luke 17:10) So as, a man's doing good, and refraining from evil, because the law encourageth to the one, and deterreth from the other, is no evidence of his being under the law; and not under grace. (Rom. 6:12, 14, 1 Pet. 3:8–12, Ps. 34:12–16, Heb. 12:28–29)

7. Neither are the forementioned uses of the law contrary to the grace of the Gospel, but do sweetly comply with it; (Gal. 3:21) the Spirit of Christ subduing and enabling the will of man to do that freely, and cheerfully, which the will of God, revealed in the law, requireth to be done. (Ezek. 36:27, Heb. 8:10, Jer. 31:33)

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. Generally speaking, what kind of comments do you hear when it comes to the law of God? What do you make of these comments? How do you respond? Why would Paul ask the rhetorical question, "*Is the law sin?*"?
2. What is a lawful use of the law?
3. What kind of valuable information does the law of God provide?
4. In what respect is sin an opportunist?
5. Discuss Paul's personal testimony when it came to how the law of God worked in him. How was he mistaken about what the law can do?
6. Is all of this an indictment against the law? How should the law of God be utilized today?

Romans 7:13-25

O Wretched Man – Part I

November 10, 2013

Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful. For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that *it is* good. But now, *it is* no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but *how* to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not *to do*, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin (Romans 7:13-25).

Introduction

On February 16, 2006 I wrote the following column, entitled *Unhappy Cosmic Accidents*, for the Daily Breeze (a local secular newspaper):

Toward the end of my teaching career I witnessed a good-faith effort to bolster the self esteem of the students of a local high school. The faculty wanted the kids to know they were special.

Virtually every student who was capable of making it to school that day was given an award. After about the 800th award the students began drawing an inevitable conclusion: "All this means is that none of us are special." The event was followed by a minor litter problem.

Poor self-image has apparently become an epidemic. Educators rifle endless avenues seeking to solve this crisis. Instilling a sense of inherent value in a teenager is no small task. Telling them they're smart, pretty, talented, funny, is simply falling short. Our failures in this arena have been disastrous.

The third leading killer of teens is suicide, following only unintentional injuries (which may not be unintentional at all) and homicides. Our children are killing themselves. It's estimated that for every successful suicide, there are 8 to 25 unsuccessful attempts; thank God for this incompetence.

The teen suicide rate has tripled since the 60's. As one who was in school in the 60's and taught in the 70's, 80's and 90's, I offer my observation.

In the early sixties the 'God notion' was becoming an unacceptable hypothesis for government funded educational institutions. This created a black hole in the human soul. Something was gone with no replacement forthcoming.

My attempt in the early 90's to notify these young desperate minds that this vacuum simply cannot be filled by anything but God found me escorted out of my classroom by two gentlemen with walkie-talkies and dark glasses. I was not invited back until, shockingly, about a month ago.

I had access to their eager teenage thoughts for more than an hour. I felt like I was throwing buckets of water on a dry and thirsty land when I told them they were each fearfully and wonderfully made by God and in the image of God. Dare I go further? With one eye on the door I pressed on.

I conveyed that they, perhaps unwittingly, had been taught that their presence on this earth was a mere accident and they were themselves accidents. They were savvy. They seemed to pick up on the spiritual and psychological consequences of such a proposition.

We're notifying our youth that they are cosmic accidents then we're vexed regarding the genesis of their depression. That's like the host of the party informing a guest that she received her invitation by accident then being mystified at her sorrow, anxiety and desire to leave the party.

The late British theologian J. Sidlow Baxter made a projection:

"Those who believe we evolved from the primordial slime have destined themselves, and those who follow, to re-evolve back into the slime from whence they believe they came."

Slime may sound overly pejorative but I don't think Baxter meant this to be an insult. When his audience laughed, he rebuked them: "You should be weeping!"

Baxter's forecast was profound. Slime has no sense of inherent value. Whoever rejoiced that they were made in the image of slime? Slime doesn't care. It just slimes around. It's not concerned if it hurts itself or others.

Of course, young people aren't slime. But we keep blasting this into their little psyches as if we're doing them a favor. Instead of being "fearfully and wonderfully made" in the "image of God"—the Imago Dei—they're cosmic accidents made in the imago slime.

Whatever one thinks of Intelligent Design, it must be admitted that the finest minds in the history of human thought, from Aristotle to Augustine to Aquinas to Galileo to Einstein to today's Alvin Plantinga, at some level, believed in Intelligent Design. It seems educationally dishonest to withhold from our children what some of the greatest thinkers in history believed.

Be that as it may, one astute young woman in the class made a startling observation: "Belief in the theory of evolution," she postulated, "requires faith." It requires faith in the scientists, in their instruments, in their observations and, above all, in the conclusions they draw based upon those observations.

No materialist has ever managed to bring the Big Bang into their laboratory to scrutinize it according to the scientific method. And the only virtue flowing from the Big Bang are a

lot of little bangs taking the lives of children in our neighborhoods. I say we give the kids the good news.

I open with this due to what appears to be a self-image problem exhibited by the Apostle Paul in this portion of Romans. This is the Apostle who, in his service of God, was subject to great labor, numerous imprisonments, countless beatings with whips and rods. Three times he was shipwrecked during his journeys to share the gospel. He was continually risking his life—danger from rivers, danger from robbers, dangers from his own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, in the wilderness, at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And on top of this, daily pressure from anxiety he endured for all the churches (2 Corinthians 11:23-29).

If anyone had lived in such a way as to be confident before God it would have been the Apostle Paul. But this passage reveals a man in conflict. It does not, however, reveal a man in despair. It is not revealing a man devoid of joy. If anything, it is the testimony of a man who had come to recognize the bedrock of true peace—a peace that surpassed understanding that was guarding his heart and mind (Philippians 4:7).

Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me (Philippians 2:17, 18).

So, however we read Romans 7:13-25, it should not be read as a complaint—a man unhappy with his lot.

No Problem with the Law

In verse 13 Paul continues his apologetic (defense) for the law of God by weighing it against his personal experience.

Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through

what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful (Romans 7:13).

In all the negative talk of the law, the problem is not the law of God at all; on the contrary, the law of God is **“holy and just and good” (Romans 7:12)**. It was not the law that produced death; it is rather an instrument of life. It was through the law that sin **“might appear sin.”**

There are many good reasons to have the commands of God on our hearts, to teach them diligently to our children, to talk of them when we sit in our house and when we walk by the way, and when we lie down, and when we rise. There are manifold benefits to bind the law of God as a sign on our hands and as frontlets between our eyes—to write them on the doorposts of our houses and our gates (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). But there may be no greater reason than for the law to reveal how exceedingly sinful our hearts actually are and how deep our need for the redemption—redemption found in the only law keeper—Jesus Christ, the righteous (1 John 2:1).

For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin (Romans 7:14).

The Law is Spiritual

This verse seems to mirror Paul’s earlier explanation of slavery to sin. **“Sold under sin”** gives the picture of a captured slave being auctioned to a severe master who will demand and demand and demand while offering no respite—like riding a horse to its exhaustion and death. This severe master is the sin within our own hearts.

Clearly the work of the law in revealing sin did not end when Paul came to faith, nor did Paul’s efforts at obeying the law. The testimony we see below reveals a man—a regenerate (born again) man—who did not walk away from the law of God. How else would there be this struggle?

There are those who think Paul is giving a nostalgic look at his pre-Christian interaction with the law. This is wrong on so many levels I haven’t time to engage. Suffice it to say for now: the verbs are in present tense; the struggle does not comport with Paul’s

definition of an unregenerate (unsaved) person who utterly abandons the quest for true righteousness but rather pursues and approves of others who pursue that which is **“deserving of death” (Romans 1:32)**. The person in the passage *wants* to do right.

Add to this, in another passage where Paul is undoubtedly recounting his pre-Christian experience, his estimation of himself was recorded: **“...concerning righteousness which is in the law, blameless” (Philippians 3:6)**. Clearly the person below does not view himself as blameless.

For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do (Romans 7:15).

What Am I Doing?

Paul is not pleading ignorance here. When he says he doesn't **“understand”** *ginosko*, it contains the idea of disapproval in the same way that when Psalm 1:6 speaks of God **“knowing the way of righteous”** it means more than mere awareness; it means *approval*. In common language we might think of someone who, in reflection upon their own behavior, asks, “What have I done?”

In this passage, Paul will offer his defense of the goodness of the law of God against the mirror of his own failure to keep it. He **“will(s)”** or desires *thelo* to do right, but ever falls short. Not only does he fail to do right, but the things he actually does he **“hate(s)”** *miso*! How is this squared with what Paul wrote elsewhere?

For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience, that we behaved in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God, and supremely so toward you (2 Corinthians 1:12).

I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day (2 Timothy 1:3).

He didn't seem to hate everything he did. So even though Paul's words seem very severe, it is not as if God had not sanctified Paul in any way whatsoever. But in the context of a righteousness that is evaluated by the law rather than grace, Paul knew that all his works, no matter how improved from his former estate, were still so mingled with sin and corruption that they had no ability to sling him one iota closer to heaven. Paul is writing as a man keenly aware of his own sin, who had beheld the holiness of God as it is expressed in God's law. We, therefore read:

If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that *it is good* (Romans 7:16).

I Agree with the Law

How opposite this is to the way the natural man functions! The natural man (and even some Christians) looks at the law of God as a critic and consumer. *Does it seem right to me? How do I feel about it? Does it work? Is it making my life better?* Paul goes in the opposite direction. My lack of success in walking in a manner consistent with the law of God does not indict the law. No, it affirms that the law is good.

But now, *it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me* (Romans 7:17).

No Longer I

It's as if every verse in this passage is an argument against this being Paul's pre-Christian experience; this one especially! In what sense could an unbeliever make this statement? Let's make it clear that this is not some copout by Paul, as if he is dismissing all culpability before God and man. He is not suggesting that his sin is some involuntary action being perpetuated by a subcutaneous alien forcing him to think, speak and do evil.

No, Paul is conveying that which is the experience, at one level or another, of all Christians who wrestle with the flesh. That internal struggle is such a psychological/spiritual bifurcation that Paul seems to split himself into two people—or perhaps more accurately a

renewed person painfully aware that the old tenant seems to have paid little heed to the eviction notice.

Paul was in Christ and, therefore, was “**a new creation. The old**” had “**passed away**” (2 Corinthians 5:17). In terms of being reconciled to God, believers are new creatures. But in terms of our sanctification (being conformed into the image of Christ) we must still contend with the old man. We are to “**put off (y)our old self...put on the new self**” (Ephesians 4:22, 24). Would it not be nice to push a button and rid ourselves of that old self? One day God will push that button, but until then the battle rages.

We will continue this thought next time, but it must be said here that this conflict only exists in those who are new creatures in Christ. And the passionate cry for deliverance with which Paul concludes this chapter, along with the expression of thankfulness to God through Jesus Christ who answered that cry, is a high point in this great epistle.

When the holy, just and good law of God has shined its light on our wretched estate and we cry for help in the atoning blood of Christ, help arrives.

In my distress I called upon the Lord; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears (Psalm 18:6).

I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth (Psalm 121:1, 2).

Let our hearts be fixed upon the hope of Christ as we prepare to go to His Table.

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. What does it mean to have a positive self-image? How can this be a good pursuit? How can this be a bad pursuit? Does our understanding of where we come from affect our self-image?
2. How would you understand the life of the Apostle Paul? Was he a good man? Was he an evil man? What was his assessment of himself?
3. Paul speaks both positively and negatively about the law of God. How is the law good? How can it be used poorly?
4. Do you think Paul is writing about his pre-Christian experience in Romans 7:13-25? Explain your answer.
5. What does it mean to be *sold under sin*? How is one delivered from such a condition? Have you been delivered?
6. Paul appears to have a clear conscience, yet at the same time does what he hates. How do you reconcile this?
7. Paul seems to split himself into two people with the words “it is no longer I.” Is this a copout? What does he mean when he speaks this way?
8. Have you ever cried to God for help? What kind of answer does God give to such a cry?

Romans 7:13-25

O Wretched Man – Part II

November 17, 2013

Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful. For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that *it is* good. But now, *it is* no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but *how* to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not *to do*, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin (Romans 7:13-25).

Review

We opened last week by discussing how the Apostle Paul appears, in this passage, to be a man in conflict with himself. This is the Apostle who, in his faithful service of God and pastoral service to his Christian brothers and sisters, endured greater hardships than most people who would ever live. If anyone had lived in such a way as to be confident before God, it would have been the Apostle Paul. But this passage reveals a man in quarrel with himself.

The passage does not, however, present a man in despair—a man devoid of joy. If anything, it is the testimony of a man who had come to recognize the bedrock of true joy and peace—a peace that surpassed understanding that was guarding his heart and mind (Philippians 4:7)

Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me (Philippians 2:17, 18).

So, however we read Romans 7:13-25, it should not be read as a complaint. It should rather be read as a man revealing the process within his own mind that ever leads him to rely upon that which is to be relied upon in order for that peace and joy to persevere.

In verse 13 Paul explains how the law is not at fault for this conflict, but how the law of God functions as an instrument of life, by showing sin to be sin. Properly understood, Paul teaches in verse 14 the **“law is spiritual”** but he is carnal (fleshly or at war with his own desires) and **“sold under sin”** giving the pictured of a captured slave under the harsh master of sin.

The work of the law in revealing sin did not end when Paul came to faith, nor did Paul’s efforts at obeying the law. The testimony we see below reveals a man—a regenerate (born again) man—who did not walk away from the law of God. We spoke briefly last time about how this is not Paul recounting his pre-Christian experience, but rather recording something currently taking place in his mind and heart—consistent with the experience of all Christians, one would think. Paul just seems to bring it to a more intense level.

Not only does he fail to do right, but the things he does he actually **“hate(s)”** *miso!* This is not to say that God had not been sanctifying Paul whatsoever. In a certain context Paul could boast of a clear conscience (2 Corinthians 1:12; 2 Timothy 1:3).

But in the context of a righteousness that is evaluated by the law rather than grace, Paul knew that all his works, no matter how improved from his former estate, were still so mingled with sin and corruption that they had no ability to sling him one iota closer to heaven. Paul is writing as a man keenly aware of his own sin. Paul

did not approach the law as a consumer or critic. Paul knew the law critiqued him and that apart from Christ it would consume him.

In verse 17 Paul conveys the experience, at one level or another, of all Christians who wrestle with the flesh. The internal struggle is such a bifurcation that Paul presents his struggle as if he is two people—the one who desires to do good warring against the presence of sin. He continues:

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but *how* to perform what is good I do not find (Romans 7:18).

To Will Is Present

Paul continues to define the struggle. In his flesh, nothing good dwells. It is important to be clear that when Paul uses **flesh** *sarki* he is not merely speaking about his material self—as if all his thoughts were holy. By the flesh Paul is speaking of his human nature; the relics of the old man in thought word and deed, even in the regenerate man, are sufficient to condemn us before a Holy God. We never need Christ less than the hour we first believed!

But unique to the person found by God's grace is that the will to obey is present. This should not be thought of as some static or inert desire unaccompanied by effort. Good intentions can be a psychological game we play with ourselves. But if they have no production whatsoever, they remain merely a mind game. I recall telling a friend I owed \$5 to that I had every intention of bringing him the money but forgot. He told me he can't buy a sandwich with my good intentions.

For Paul (as evidenced by his life) the will was accompanied by great effort. But in the context of this passage, where Paul reflects upon the Holy law of God and the light it shines upon his deeds, a performance suitable to the holiness of God is not to be found. And if we think we have found it, we understood the Scriptures amiss.

For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice (Romans 7:19).

Paul's Practice

What does it mean to **practice** *prasso* something? The verb in this verse is in the present, active, indicative. It doesn't mean to practice the piano in order to improve. It refers to an operation as a course of life. One might be said to be in the practice of eating or breathing. Paul was in the lifelong practice of seeking to do good. This practice was of great benefit to those who would be his neighbor and was effective toward the advancement of Christ's kingdom.

But Paul was never deluded into thinking that in all of these achievements he had no need, or even a lesser need, of the love, mercy and forgiveness of God found in the blood of Christ; a love from God that did not proceed as a response to human obedience, but a love whose source was the mere exertion of God's good pleasure. It was in light of this need that Paul recognized his lifelong practice of sin and his lifelong need of grace.

Now if I do what I will not *to do*, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me (Romans 7:20).

No Longer I

Similar to verse 17, this is not Paul dismissing his own behavior, but presenting the great dichotomy in his own soul. One might think of Luther in his visit to Rome, observing first hand for the first time the corruption of the church of which he was part. It was his church, the body of Christ that he loved—of which he was part. But he was, as it were, a singular voice crying for its repentance and reformation.

But within Paul there was more than a Luther—there was the Spirit of Christ which, through the law, revealed Paul's sin and which, through the blood of the Covenant, unveiled Paul's redemption. And this is the distinction between who Paul was and what dwelled in him—something he presents as its own law.

I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the

law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. (Romans 7:21-23).

Its Own Law

So certain is this conflict between the old man and the new creature in Christ that Paul designates it as a law in itself. In his heart, the true believer will ever delight in the law of God. To despise, reject and live in utter disobedience to the law of God marks out an unregenerate (unsaved) person. But to approach the law as one who feels they have conquered the requisite righteousness revealed in it to God's satisfaction may be called the height of folly.

In verse 23 Paul completes his description of the conflict by acknowledging how the goodness of the law shuts the cage, bringing him **“into captivity to the law of sin.”** There are various trials in life that we can wiggle through. We negotiate; we seek to find some physical or psychological tranquility; we look for an exit or, at least, a cranny for temporary respite while we gather our thoughts and plan our next move.

Paul's assessment of himself against the holiness of God revealed in the holiness of God's law provided no such exit. We see one of the holiest of God's sinful children curl up and offer a fetal cry for help.

O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death (Romans 7:24)?

O Wretched Man

There is no middle ground; the grace of God both diagnoses and treats man's wretched estate. To fall short of acknowledging the inevitable end of the disease (which is death) is to fall short of appropriating its only remedy. Those throughout the history of the church who have downplayed the depths of man's depravity have undermined the power of God's grace in the blood of Christ.

Paul's assessment of himself was not that of a man merely hobbled by sin, but even as a Christian, one who would ever confess his **wretched** *talaiporos* and pathetic estate before God. We do man no favor when we alter Newton's words from “Amazing grace...who

saved a *wretch* like me” to “Amazing grace...who saved a *soul* like me.” In an effort to save man’s dignity, we may be forfeiting his soul.

One wonders if Paul, when uttering this cry, considered his own words earlier in this epistle (Romans 4:7, 8), where he quotes David:

Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,” and you forgave the iniquity of my sin (Psalm 32:1-5).

There is no benefit in keeping silent about our sins before God. There are many avenues man has gone down in seeking to cover his own iniquity. It began with the fig leaves and continued by denying there is a God, denying that sin is sin, redefining or seeking to rationalize or the most popular, drawing the conclusion that our good deeds will somehow outweigh our bad.

When it comes to peace with God, the answer Paul discovered and offers to us is to acknowledge our wretched condition and cry out to God: **“Who will deliver me?”** It was with great confidence that Paul wrote toward the end of his ministry—toward the end of his life (2 Timothy 4:6):

The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen (2 Timothy 4:18).

Perhaps it was with his mind prepared for the great 8th chapter of Romans, where Paul will expand upon the power, depth and perseverance of that deliverance, that he finishes his thought with words of gratitude **“I thank God—through Jesus Christ our**

Lord!” as well as a summary of what he has been presenting in the second half of chapter 7: **“So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin” (Romans 7:25).** It is with a proper understanding of the human conflict and the heavenly solution that we will embark upon chapter 8 in our next meeting.

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. Review Romans 7:13-17. What is the conflict? Was Paul in despair? Was he complaining? How did the law function in Paul's life? Did he stop trying to obey it? Was this Paul's pre-Christian experience? Was Paul not sanctified at all? Discuss being a consumer or a critic when it comes to the law of God.
2. What does Paul mean by the *flesh*?
3. Discuss the *will* as it related to Paul's struggle.
4. What was Paul's *practice*? What was Paul's lifelong need? What is your lifelong practice and need?
5. What did Paul mean when he said *it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me*?
6. Should a Christian delight in the law of God? What does that look like? What does that produce?
7. According to Romans 7:24, what is man's condition before God? How does the grace of God both diagnose and treat man's problem? Has this happened to you?
8. What does it mean to cry out for deliverance? Have you done this?

