Romans 7:14-25

PREVIOUS NEXT

ROMANS ROAD to RIGHTEOUSNESS				
Romans 1:18-3:20	Romans — 3:21-5:21	Romans — 6:1-8:39	Romans — 9:1-11:36	Romans — 12:1-16:27
SIN	SALVATION	SANCTIFICATION	SOVEREIGNTY	SERVICE
NEED FOR SALVATION	WAY OF SALVATION	LIFE OF SALVATION	SCOPE OF SALVATION	SERVICE OF SALVATION
God's Holiness In Condemning Sin	God's Grace In Justifying Sinners	God's Power In Sanctifying Believers	God's Sovereignty In Saving Jew and Gentile	Gods Glory The Object of Service
Deadliness of Sin	Design of Grace	Demonstration of Salvation		
		Power Given	Promises Fulfilled	Paths Pursued
Righteousness Needed	Righteousness Credited	Righteousness Demonstrated	Righteousness Restored to Israel	Righteousness Applied
God's Righteousness IN LAW	God's Righteousness IMPUTED	God's Righteousness OBEYED	God's Righteousness IN ELECTION	God's Righteousness DISPLAYED
Slaves to Sin	Slaves to God			Slaves Serving God
Doctrine				Duty
Life by Faith				Service by Faith
Modified from Irving L. Jensen's excellent work "Jensen's Survey of the NT"				

RELATED RESOURCES

Romans 7:14-16
Romans 7:17-20
Romans 7:21-25

Romans 7:14-25
The Frustration of Living Under the Law -- Part 3

by Dr. Wayne A. Barber

Romans 7:14 For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. 15 For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. 16 But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. 17 So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. 18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. 19 For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. 20 But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. 21 I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. 22 For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, 23 but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord ! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin

When a person understands what it means to "live under grace," he understands the hymn "I Need Thee Every Hour." He is a person like the apostle Paul who has learned to never again put any confidence in his own flesh. He has learned that the only works the flesh can produce are unrighteous works. He understands that sin is when he has failed to put his trust into Christ and His Spirit to do in him what he failed to admit that he could not do. He realizes that just as his own self-effort to please God could not save

himself, neither could his self-effort sanctify himself.

It is comforting to hear the reports of revival that is happening all over our country. I was listening to a tape of a pastor in Texas sharing what took place in his church. The thing that impressed me, was not what took place in his church, but what took place in him. He came to the realization that grace brings us all, that all of his training, all of his efforts were useless apart from the empowering grace of God. In short, he realized that "he could not, and God never said he could, but God could and always said He would."

In Romans 5:2 Paul told us how the transforming power of grace is accessed. He says, "through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God."

When we cast all of our expectations upon Christ and upon His Word, trusting only in Him, then we have just accessed His grace, which is not only His undeserved favor, but His transforming power. If we choose to put ourselves back under law, instead of His grace, we are putting ourselves back under bondage to the very thing from which Christ has freed us.

In chapters 6 and 7, Paul is showing us the connection between the controlling power of sin and the law. Have you seen it yet? It is under the law that flesh is energized. It is dead apart from the law, but, when you take your focus off of Jesus, and begin to trust in your own efforts, then you are once again back up under the law, performing for God, and your flesh will frustrate you beyond measure.

How sad for a free person to foolishly put himself back under the bondage of sin. You see, under the Law, the flesh is commanded to perform, and then it is condemned in all that it does because it cannot measure up to the same law that commanded it.

Well, it is with these thoughts that we enter verse 14 of chapter 7. Remember I told you that I'm preaching this as "I SEE IT!"

For years I missed the point of what Paul is doing in chapter 7 verses 14 to the end of the chapter. A lot of folks spin their wheels trying to decide whether the use of the first person singular pronoun is Paul referring to a time when he was lost or to something else. His use of the present tense when it comes to not being able to do what God requires also causes much confusion.

But, if you go back to the premise of being under law, the flesh being commanded to perform but unable to please God, then it is not as big a problem. Any time you place yourself back under law, and you depend upon your own self efforts to please God, then you will find utter frustration, and a bondage to your flesh.

Let's continue in Romans 7. We saw in verses 7-13 the picture of how the Law is useful in revealing to a person his need for salvation. The first thing I want you to see in verses 14-17 is that the Law purposefully reveals all that pertains to our flesh. This is the purpose of it: to reveal the inadequacies of the flesh. Verse 14 is very difficult to understand: "For we know that the Law is spiritual; but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin."

Paul says that we all know something. "Know" is the perfect active indicative of eido, to know intuitively, that intuitive knowledge that comes from the Holy Spirit being in us. What do we know? That the Law is spiritual. The Law refers to the Mosaic law.

"Spiritual" is the Greek word pneumatikos. It refers to "that which pertains to spiritual things." The law pertains to that which is spiritual. Put, Paul says, "I am of flesh." The word there is sarkikos. Note that the ending is the same—ikos—I am of that which pertains to the flesh. I am earthbound.

Let me show you how Paul uses that word elsewhere:

Romans 15:27: "Yes, they were pleased to do so, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things."

1 Corinthians 3:1: "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ."

1 Corinthians 3:3: "for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?"

1 Corinthians 3:4: "For when one says, 'I am of Paul,' and another, 'I am of Apollos,' are you not mere men?"

2 Corinthians 10:4: "for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses."

It appears to me that Paul is saying that he know that the Law pertains to that which is spiritual, but there is something about him that is still flesh

The verse continues, "sold into bondage to sin." Now, the word "bondage" is not there. More correctly it should read, "It is sold under the sin." "Sold" is the perfect passive participle of piprasko. It means "to be under the lure of", "to be devoted to". And here

again, the definite article is used—THE sin.

Paul is, I believe, saying that even though the law is spiritual, there is this fleshly part of him that is still under the lure of sin. What does he mean? There are two distinct possibilities: Is he referring to the fact that he is in "Adam," a being that is in total bondage to sin, completely devoted to it as chapter 5:8 told us, lost as a sinner? Or, is he referring to the fact that the fleshly part of him is still under the influence of sin because of the fact that Adam sinned—that his spirit is taken care of, but his body of sin still has resident in it the propensity to sin? Either way, the "law" reveals how sinful flesh is.

Watch as he continues. Verse 15: "For that which I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate." This is where it is more confusing. "For that which I am doing," is in the present tense, active sense. "I do not understand" is a word we've seen before, ginosko, to experientially know.

"For I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate." ""Would like to do" is the Greek word thelo. There are two words in the Greek that are translated the same, even though their meanings are slightly different.

One of them is boule. Look in 2 Peter 3:9: "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance."

The word here, thelo, means "that which is predetermined and that which one is totally given to see it take place." Paul says that he is determined (thelo) to do good, but instead he is pursuing something that he hates. The Greek word is miseo. Whatever it is that he is referring to is obviously something that he detests doing but seems unable to stop himself. It sure sounds like a lost person to me, unless you look at the next verse.

In verse 16 we see that the Law reveals the sin of the flesh, whether it be before salvation or not: "But if I do the very thing I do not wish to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that it is good."

In this awful practice of doing what he hates, Paul is agreeing with the law and showing that the law is a good thing. Paul is either lost, or he is saved and has his eye on the law trying to accomplish the good things that it requires in the energy of his flesh. The flesh is exposed every time, because the law energizes sin that resides in it, then condemns it. Whether Paul is simply illustrating how frustrating it is for a person to so love God that he tries to please him in the flesh, or that he is lost and religious wanting to please God but in his own fleshly efforts, the Law exposes it, and when we work in our flesh and fail, we must agree that the Law is good. The Law is spiritual, and will always purposefully reveal that which is of the flesh.

Then, in verses 17-21, Paul shows us practically why every man, whether saved or unsaved, must recognize the evil of his own flesh. Look at verses 17-18: "So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which indwells me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not."

If you put verses 17 and 18 together, then they appear to identify not only the problem Paul has, but the place where that problem dwells. "No longer am I the one doing it," refers back to doing the things in which he hates but can't seem to help himself.

If he is talking about a time when he was lost, then why the phrase "no longer"? He could be saying the law has exposed the fact that the sinful nature of Adam is controlling him to the point that he cannot help himself as a lost man. Notice it says "THE sin that indwells me." There's the definite article again.

But, when you put verse 18 with it, it opens the door in my mind to encompass a saved man who is still focused on the law. "For I know that nothing good dwells in me." It is interesting how Paul makes this statement and then qualifies it. The word for good is not kalos, but agathos, which is used to describe the righteous works God wants to do through us. Could he be saying that "nothing righteous dwells in me"?

Then he qualifies it: "that is, in my flesh." We know that the flesh resides in the body of sin that is now powerless when under grace. There is nothing righteous about it.

Look at verse 19: "For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish." It is obvious that Paul makes it clear that there is a wishing—a will that has decided. Theleo means more than a casual wish. It means a determined mindset. "For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish."

He is obviously frustrated, because he is not able to carry out the good desires he has fixed his mind upon. Could it be that he is still focused on the law and it is daily condemning his flesh?

Go on to verse 20: "But if I am doing the very thing I do not wish, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me." Notice the "if"—he doesn't say he is, but "if" he is. But if what? "I am doing the very thing I do not wish." Here he says this is not "thelo"—it is not his determined mindset to do these things. At no time would he ever intend to do this.

But, he says, "I am no longer the one doing it." It's not "me" any longer, "but sin which dwells in me." How could a non-believer have a "no longer"?

He says, "I would never—in any way, shape, or form—choose to do this, but it is the 'sin' living in my 'house,' oikeo, causing me to do it.

Verse 21: "I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good." Paul says, I find, actually I have discovered (heurisko) a principle, a "law," that "the evil (kakos)" is present in me. It is inherent in my flesh. He is simply restating what he said in verse 18. In his flesh is a law; it is the very presence of evil within his flesh, his body of sin. But, he says, he is "the one who wishes to do good." Again, the word there is thelo—he has "determined in his will" to do good.

It doesn't make a lot of sense to me that a person who is in Adam, under the law, doomed to the unrighteous works of the flesh, ungodly, devoted to sin, and an enemy to all that God represents, would say "I'm the one who wishes to do good."

Then Paul shows us two principles, two laws. Verse 22: "For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man." Paul says, I agree with it, it is that which God the Father demands, it is spiritual in nature; it is good; it is necessary.

It resides in the "inner man." I might add, in the person of the lawgiver Himself the Holy Spirit of God. The "inner man" is equated with the "heart" in Ephesians 3:16-17: "that He would grant you according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith…". The inner man is where the Spirit comes to dwell in us. There is a principle as to how this works.

Then in verse 23 Paul says, "but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members." The good, and the spiritual law of God written on Paul's heart, keeping ever before him what God desired in his character, was what Paul truly desired. But, he recognized that "fleshly part of him" that had a different law in the members of his body, "that old body of sin that was powerless unless heeded." And this law of sin "waged war against the law of my mind" and made Paul a prisoner of the law of sin, which was in his members.

Could Paul be saying "I am so conscious of the law and what it demands, that I want in my mind to do what it says written on my heart, but every time I try, I end up doing the very things that it tells me not to do"?

Verse 24: "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?" This led him to think of himself as a wretched man needing desperately to be set free from this body of death. When we look at the law and all it demands, and in our minds will to accomplish it with all our strength, we will always fail. The law forces us back into bondage to the flesh.

Verse 25: "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin."

Always, with the flesh you and I serve the law of sin. It cannot save us, nor can it sanctify us. The culprit is the flesh, which is always empowered by the law.

Only when we put our trust in our flesh, signifying that we're now back up under law, do we see the futility of doing it our way. Paul told us in Romans 6:14: "For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace