

Romans 7:7-25

Intro: Here we come to a section of Scripture that has been interpreted differently by numerous godly men from Chrysostom to Augustine to Calvin to Martin Lloyd Jones to G. Campbell Morgan to Piper and Schriener, etc. So I am going to do my best!

--There are three main views: the person is unsaved, saved, or a generalized description.

--First, I am going to reject the “generalized description” view as it is clear Paul is speaking of himself and has been through the book of Romans. He writes: ***I myself*** in **25**, and that same phrase is used in **9:3** and **15:14**. Also, the ***me*** of **7:23**, is the same ***me*** of **8:2**.

--Commentators agree that Paul moves from speech which is past tense in **7-13**, to that of the present tense in **14-25**. Paul is clearly giving a description of personal experience as he sums up in **21** saying: ***I find then. . .***

--Second, the question then becomes: *Is Paul speaking of his experience as an unbeliever or as a believer?* There are great tensions here, particularly in **14 & 22**. Can a believer be called ***carnal*** and described as ***sold under sin***? Can an unbeliever ***delight in the law of God according to the inward man***?

1) Yes, there is Biblical precedence to say a believer is carnal and therefore sold under sin as Paul does in **1 Cor. 3:1**. There is no Biblical precedence to speak of the unsaved as loving the law of God with the inner man—especially in relation to what Paul has already laid out earlier in the book.

2) Those who see this as a description of Paul’s unsaved life under the law are afraid that ascribing this description to a believer leaves them in an unbiblical position of defeat. Which is an understandable contention, but it ignores the note of victorious discovery in **25**, and the previous and future descriptions of struggle in **6:11-13 & 8:12-13**. Commentators and theologians can get a little too clear-cut, whereas Paul’s letter (without chapters) is more organic.

3) Maybe the largest difficulty for those seeing this as an unsaved person is the larger context of the epistle.

-Paul is no longer talking about the unsaved and justification. Paul already dealt with the unsaved with or without the law in chapters **1-3**. Paul is addressing believers about sanctification and their new relation to sin and the law.

-Paul always builds to a logical conclusion, and the culmination is a cry, not for the forgiveness of sins, but for deliverance from bondage. The power and presence of sin, and not the penalty of sin.

--I am joining my opinion with those who see this passage as the descriptive experience of a Christian—saved and justified—discovering they are still carnal (**14**), weak (**18**), and in need of Jesus just as much in sanctification as they needed Jesus in justification.

--Even those who hold the “unsaved” position admit this is still a true/known battle of Christian life from other passages such as **Gal. 5:17**.

--There are some other finer nuances, but those are the basics of the arguments.

Verses 7-8:

--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.

--Having shown that they are now free from the demands of the law in the death of Christ, the question remains as to the place of the law. If they are dead to sin and the law, are they one and the same? Paul says, **Certainly not!** He is going to show that the fault of sin lies in us and not the law of God.

--Paul states first that the law is what brought sin to light in his life. The law shows sin. He had already proven that sin was still present without the law (**1:18-20; 2:12, 14-15; 5:12-14**), but now he is saying that without the law, the horrible nature of sin was not clearly known—the sinfulness of sin.

--Here, Paul is pointing out the spiritual nature of the law and the evident sinful nature of man.

*F.F. Bruce (Romans): *“The smoker may forget how much he wants to smoke until he sees a sign which says ‘No Smoking’.”**

--He then shows that the commandment to not covet revealed and stirred up his covetousness. By forbidding what we cannot keep ourselves from doing, the law proves our nature of, and bondage to, sin. That seed of covetous desire was already there in Paul’s heart, whether in action or thought, and remains despite his, or the law’s, disapproval.

--The law of God reveals our sinfulness to ourselves.

Verses 9-12:

--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.

--For a while, Paul was happy and thought he was doing pretty well morally and spiritually, but the law brought his sin to life through the conscience. Paul saw that he had a living sin nature, and that killed off all hopes in his flesh/himself.

--The commandments in and of themselves are **holy and just and good**: They were there to protect **life**: life between us and God, life in the family circle, human life, speech, interaction, property, desire, etc., all good things.

--The real cause of death in all this was sin and not the law that simply revealed sin. Paul’s blindness to his own sin and weakness was an effect of sin’s deception.

--Sin was what forced him into sin despite his better judgment, as seen in God's perfect law, and therefore made him incur condemnation and death under the law.

Verses 13-14:

--(13) *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.*

--The law is not our ultimate enemy. It still has its place in pushing the lawless to Christ. The law was a spiritual work of God and the Holy Spirit. Jesus' very life was the fulfillment of it.

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

--Paul gets to the heart of the problem for all of us. See the **we** in 14! Christians know that the law is spiritual, not the unsaved Jew. The law reveals that both desires and acts are evil. The law shows that we cannot escape all the sinful inclinations of *self*.

--Paul says that my problem is that I am **carnal, sold under sin**. Paul is not "in the flesh" as a description of life without the Spirit of God. He is simply admitting that he is still earthly, carnal, and connected to imperfection.

--Was this true of the great apostle Paul? Yes!

*Govett (On Romans): *"Was that true of Paul? Certainly! He is not speaking now of the working of the Holy Spirit within him, whereby he was prevented from acting out the emotions of the flesh: but he teaches us, what is seldom taught, that the flesh does not improve by the man's conversion. A new principle is implanted; but the old is not removed. The new and old are at strife together. This is the picture of the conflict."**

--For all true believers, there was a time when we were *only* sinners. There will be a day when we are *only* saints. For now, we are saved saint-sinners. *A mixed bag for sure!*

--Paul clearly spoke of the natural man (unsaved), the carnal man (saved but living without spiritual power), and the spiritual man (mature, believers walking in the Spirit).

--He is now going to describe his own version of this life—something we all understand.

1) In 15-17, Paul describes his inability to keep himself from doing what he disapproves of.

2) In 18-20, Paul describes his inability to do what he approves of.

Verses 15-20:

--If you don't understand what Paul is doing here, you will think this is a conversation between Gollum and Smeagol.

--(15-16) *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.*

--Paul, even in wrongdoing, finds he argues against himself with the spiritually perfect law.

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

--Paul is now doing the *reckoning* or *considering* he instructed these believers to do back in **6:11**. He has to do so not because sin *used* to dwell in him, but because of the sin that presently *dwells in me*.

--Our great hindrance is declared to be something on the inside, not something compulsive from the outside. My ultimate problem is me. *Not demons physically dragging me into bad movies!*

--(18-20) *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.*

--Here we find Paul like those early disciples in Gethsemane—spirit willing but flesh weak. Desiring to do good but falling short. *We often have some fly in the ointment.*

--Even so, Paul again ascribes this weakness in his flesh to indwelling sin. He again reckons himself dead to this and alive to God. *A question to help us reckon or consider as believers can be: *Where is this desire coming from? Satan or the Holy Spirit?**

Verses 21-23:

--*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.*

--Here is a summation of the problem in sanctifying sinners. (Again, it is hard to have verse **22** be true of anyone but a believer, especially in contrast with **8:7**.)

--There is a law of opposing forces in us as there is in the world around us. *Gravity (sin) and Aerodynamics (Spirit). Though one may transcend the other, it does not mean the other is totally gone from existence. Gravity remains as the airplane flies.*

--So you and I love God through the Spirit (**5:5**), and obey and delight in His law from the heart (**6:17**), and yet still need to be exhorted to present our members to Christ (**6:13-14**)!

--Even so, this battle can only happen with believers. There is no battle otherwise because there are no conflicting laws or forces as **7:21 + 8:2**.

Verse 24:

--*O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*

--The word for *wretched* has the idea of being totally worn out after taxing work or a battle. God comes in to save us when we are totally finished exerting our own strength.

--This description is not the weariness of an unbeliever with sin. This is the weariness of the work of sanctification within carnal saints. When two great opposites meet—like lava and water—they make a great noise.

--I understand the commentators who contend that Christians do not live in this place, but in some sense, I disagree. We all have to admit—as the apostle is here—we are not yet free of this tension until glory. Measures of victory are real—as we see here—but total victory awaits eternity.

--I see this cry as the agony of Paul the Apostle with his predicament. A man with incredible spiritual hunger for God and hatred of all that kept him from God—yet still a human man imperfect and unglorified—forced day by day to realize the depths of corruption in him.

--This happens to each of us in our own way.

*Alexander Whyte: *“So some have experienced more soul trials after their conversion than when they were awakened to a sense of their lost condition.”**

Verse 25:

--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.

--This would be quite depressing if not for **25** and on. If not for Jesus Christ!

--The question is not: *How will I be delivered?* but, ***Who will deliver me?*** This is Paul’s great lesson in sanctification. To teach us to look to The Teacher—The Master!

--The central shift in mentality is from looking to a method, or action, or effort, or religious “secret” to a person—The Person!

--Not church attendance; not the new “how to” book on marriage; not the new song, retreat, conference, or spiritual high; not even Bible reading or prayer. All these are well and good, but we cannot trust in them for deliverance. At best, they simply help me find Him.

--Some fear this emphasis on looking to Christ alone for sanctification, but His help is more to be trusted than my effort, responsibility, or ability. In this cry, self-effort is over. Gratitude and thanks are expressions of hope in another. Oh, what a sweet deliverance this is!

*Brother Lawrence (Practicing His Presence): *“When I fail in my duty I simply admit my faults, saying to God, ‘I shall never do otherwise if You leave me to myself. It is You who must stop my falling and it is You who must amend that which is amiss.’ After such praying I allow myself no further uneasiness about my faults. . . I have no scruples; for when I fail in my duty I readily acknowledge it saying, ‘I am used to doing so; I shall never do otherwise if I am left to myself.’ If I do not fail, then I give God thanks, acknowledging that the strength comes from Him.”**

--You see, death is a troubling and difficult thing—especially death to self, pride, and our strength and independence. That death hurts us. We fight long and hard to keep some measure of our self alive—even in our sanctification. Even so, we must not be stumbled or shocked by this.

--If you have been trying to live this Christian life and you are totally worn out, and you feel like you are about to drown, you love God, but you are hopeless in your own strength, then take courage, because you are on the good and right way.

--Rest assured, it is far better for anyone to be honestly in Romans 7 than falsely in Romans 8! The cry of your heart and Paul's (not for forgiveness, as that is already given, but for freedom from bondage to sin) will not go unheard by the Savior who already carried the sins of the world.

--The law of the Spirit is working in you and deliverance will come to you, and when it does, your only answer will be that your deliverance came ***through Jesus Christ our Lord!***