

Romans 7:7-25

Intro: Here we come to a section of Scripture that has a number of godly men seeing it differently 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!

--Three main views of unsaved, saved, or general description.

--First, I am going to reject the “general description view as it is clear Paul is speaking of himself and has been through the book of Romans. We see him say: *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**.

--There is also agreement that Paul moves from speech that is past tense in **7-13** to that of present tense in **14-25**. So he 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 great tensions coming 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 shows 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 as 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 to ascribe it to the believer, leaves them in an unbiblical defeated position. 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 where 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 is talking to believers about sanctification and new relations to sin and the law.

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

--So I am joining the group of those that see this as the descriptive experience of a Christian—saved and justified, discovering that they are still carnal (**14**) and 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*

--There are some other finer nuances but that is the basics of the arguments.

Verses 7-8:

--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 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 the light in his life. It 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 sin 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 sin and bondage to sin. That seed of sinful desire was already there in Paul’s heart whether in action or thought and remains despite his or the laws disapproval.

Verses 9-12:

--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)** 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)** Here Paul gets to the problem for all of us: see the **we** of **14!** Christians know that the law is spiritual—not the unsaved Jew. The law shows both the desire and act 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, 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 time 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!*

--So Paul clearly spoke of the natural man (unsaved), the carnal man (saved but living without spiritual power), and the spiritual man (mature saved 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**) Paul, even in wrongdoing, finds he argues against himself with the spiritually perfect law.

--(**17**) Here we see Paul 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 problem is me. *Not demons physically dragging me into bad movies!*

--(**18-20**) Here we find Paul like those early disciples in Gethsemane—spirit willing but flesh weak. Desiring to do good but falling short. *We 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 helpful question to help us reckon or consider as believers can be: *Where is this desire coming from? Satan or the Spirit?**

Verses 21-23:

--Here is a summation of the problem with 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.*

--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 not battle otherwise because there are no conflicting laws or forces as **7:21 + 8:2**.

Verse 24:

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

--This 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 statement that we 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 totally 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:

--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 but His help is more to be trusted than my effort, responsibility, or ability. Here, self-effort is over. My expectations are in another. O 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, do 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, than take courage because you are on the good and right way.

--Rest assured it is far better for you 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.

--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!***