

Romans Session 91

The Believer and Indwelling Sin 2

Romans 7:14-25 (NASB)

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.*

We are looking at one of the most mis-understood passages in the New Testament. It has been interpreted many different ways and has created some real problems for those who follow those interpretations.

The questions, such as is the person Paul is talking about a Christian or a non-Christian?

Is Paul talking about Himself for someone else?

If he is talking about himself, was the condition he describes who he was before he became a believer or after?

So, as we go forward we must clarify who he is speaking of and when!

Some interpreters believe that chapter 7 describes the carnal, or fleshly, Christian, one who is living on a very low level of spirituality.

Many suggest that this person is frustrated, legalistic Christian who attempts in his own power to please God by trying to live up to the Mosaic Law.

But the attitude expressed in chapter 7 is not typical of legalist, who tend to be self-satisfied with their fulfillment of the law. Most people are attracted to legalism in the first place because it offers the prospect of living up to God's standards by one's own power.

It seems to me that Paul is here describing the most spiritual and mature of Christians, who, the more they honestly measure themselves against God's standards of righteousness the more they realize how much they fall short.

The closer we get to God, the more we see our own sin.

Thus, it is immature, fleshly, and legalistic persons who tend to live under the illusion that they are spiritual and that they measure up well by God's standards.

The level of spiritual insights, brokenness, contrition, and humility that characterize the person depicted in Romans 7 are actually marks of a spiritual and mature believer, who before God has no trust in his own goodness and achievements.

It also seems, as one would naturally suppose from the use of the first person singular (which appears forty-six times in Rom. 7:7-25), that Paul is speaking of himself.

Not only is he the subject of this passage, but it is the mature and spiritually seasoned apostle that is portrayed. Only a Christian at the height of spiritual maturity would either experience or be concerned about such deep struggles of heart, mind and conscience.

The more clearly and completely he saw God's holiness and goodness, the more Paul recognized and grieved over his own sinfulness.

Paul reflects the same humility many places in his writing.

1 Corinthians 15:9 (NASB)

⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

Although here he speaks of his attitude and actions before his conversion, he speaks of his apostleship in the present tense, considering himself still to be unworthy of that high calling.

Ephesians 3:8 (NASB)

⁸ To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ,

Here he speaks of himself as the "***least of all saints***"

1 Timothy 1:12 (NASB)

¹² I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service,

1 Timothy 1:15 (NASB)

¹⁵ It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.

He knew and confessed that whatever he was in Christ was fully due to the grace of God;

1 Corinthians 15:10 (NASB)

¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.

Listen, only a new creation in Christ lives with such tension of sin against righteousness, because only a Christian has the divine nature of God with in him.

Because he is no longer in Adam but now in Christ, he possesses the Spirit-given desire to be conformed to Christ's own image and be made perfect in righteousness.

But sin still clings to his humanness, although in his inner being he hates and despises it.

He has passed from darkness to light and now shares in Christ's death, burial, resurrection, and eternal life, but as he grows in Christlikeness, he also becomes more and more aware of the continued presence and power of indwelling sin, which he loathes, and longs to be rid of.

It is such sensitivity that caused the fourth-century church Father John Chrysostom to say in his *Second Homily of Eutrophius* that he feared nothing but sin.

The person depicted in Romans 7 has a deep awareness of his own sin and an equally deep desire to please the Lord in all things.

Only a mature Christian could be so characterized.

The Puritan writer Thomas Watson observed that one of the certain signs of '*sanctification is an antipathy against sin, a hypocrite may leave sin, yet love it; as a serpent casts its coat but keeps its sting; but a sanctified person can say he not only leaves sin but loathes it.*' And he goes on to say to the Christian, '*God has not only chained up sin, but changed the nature, and made thee as a king's daughter, all glorious within. He has put upon thee the breastplate of holiness, which, though it may be shot at, can never be shot through*' (*A Body of Divinity* [London: Banner of truth, rev.ed., 1965], pp. 246,250).

The spiritual believer is sensitive to sin because he knows it grieves the Holy Spirit;

Ephesians 4:30 (NASB)

³⁰ Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Because it dishonors God;

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (NASB)

¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?

²⁰ For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

Because sin keeps his prayers from being answered;

1 Peter 3:12 (NASB)

¹² "FOR THE EYES OF THE LORD ARE TOWARD THE RIGHTEOUS, AND HIS EARS ATTEND TO THEIR PRAYER, BUT THE FACE OF THE LORD IS AGAINST THOSE WHO DO EVIL."

And because sin makes his life spiritually powerless;

1 Corinthians 9:27 (NASB)

²⁷ but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

The spiritual believer is sensitive to sin because it causes good things from God to be withheld;

Jeremiah 5:25 (NASB)

²⁵ *Your iniquities have turned these away, And your sins have withheld good from you.*

Because it robs him the Joy of Salvation;

Psalms 51:12 (NASB)

¹² *Restore to me the joy of Your salvation And sustain me with a willing spirit.*

Also, because it inhibits spiritual growth;

1 Corinthians 3:1 (NASB)

¹ *And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ.*

And, because it brings chastisement from the Lord;

Hebrews 12:7 (NASB)

⁷ *It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?*

Sin causes the Christian, from being a fit vessel for the Lord to use;

2 Timothy 2:21 (NASB)

²¹ *Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.*

The spiritual Christian is sensitive to sin because it pollutes Christian fellowship;

1 Corinthians 10:21 (NASB)

²¹ *You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.*

And because it prevents participating properly in the Lord's Supper;

1 Corinthians 11:28-29 (NASB)

²⁸ *But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup.*

²⁹ *For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly.*

And because it can endanger his physical life and health;

1 Corinthians 11:30 (NASB)

³⁰ *For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.*

1 John 5:16 (NASB)

¹⁶ *If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those*

who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this.

As Paul pointed out in the previous chapter of this study, He uses past tense verbs in Romans 7:7-13, which doubtless indicates he was speaking of his pre-conversion life. Beginning in verse 14, however, and continuing throughout the rest of the chapter, he uses the present tense exclusively in reference, to himself.

The abrupt, obvious, and consistent change of tenses strongly supports the idea that in verses 14-25 Paul is describing his life as a Christian.

Next time together we will begin with verse 14 where we see an obvious change in the subject's circumstances in relation to sin.