

THE POWER OF SIN IN THE FLESH

TEXT: ROMANS 7:14-25

INTRODUCTION:

1. We have seen in our study in Romans chapter 7 that the law does not save from the penalty of sin or the power of sin. The law reveals sin (7:7).
2. The law cannot justify, and the law cannot sanctify. The law condemns.
3. We are going to pick up where we left off, and tonight we will see look at what the Bible says about the law, and about spiritual conflicts. The apostle Paul said in Galatians 5:17, “The flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other” (Galatians 5:17).
4. Romans 8:1 says, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”
5. Romans 7:14—25 deals with the power of sin in the flesh (cf. 7:18). The flesh cannot be changed or improved.
6. In chapter 8, Paul teaches that the solution is the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit (8:1-4). Not the law, but the Holy Spirit.
7. It should be noted that in Romans 7 the Holy Spirit is not even mentioned once, but in chapter 8 He is mentioned 18 times.
8. Romans 7 depicts the struggle of a man who is trying to be holy and spiritual by his own efforts, but he is defeated by the power of indwelling sin (7:14, 15).
9. Chapter 7 teaches us what the law can do (reveals sin) and cannot do (deliver us from sin). Chapter 8 teaches us that our victory over sin comes through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.
10. The repetitive use of the first person pronouns – “I, me, mine, etc.” (7:7-25) reveal the frustration and powerlessness of trying to please God in the flesh. It is all about me and my efforts, etc.
11. In ourselves -- apart from God's grace -- "dwelleth no good thing" (7:18). People have wondered if verses 7--25 represent the apostle Paul's own experience. To this question, W.H. Griffith Thomas said, "Yes, undoubtedly, for it is impossible to read what he says without realizing it as a personal experience" (*St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*).
12. The word "law" is used 23 times in Romans chapter 7, and it is used in different ways, usually referring to the Mosaic law (cf. 7:7).

I. THE LAW OF GOD (7:22)

1. The *Scofield Study Bible* describes this passage as, "The strife of the two natures under the law." People often assume that these verses describe the conflict between man's two natures, but the emphasis here in Romans 7 is the inability of the law to justify or sanctify.
2. People ask: did this spiritual conflict take place before Paul's conversion, back when he was a religious Jew, or do these verses describe his struggle as a believer?
3. These Scriptures can apply to both saved and lost, but they primarily describe the struggle of an unregenerate religious man. W.H. Griffith Thomas said, "The law cannot recover us from our evil nature and change our dispositions and powers. So the chapter with its emphasis on 'I,' descriptive of the life of religious self, culminates in hopeless inability when looked at apart from grace, and contends itself with the division of interest expressed in the closing words" (*St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*).
4. Here in Romans 7 we have a picture of a religious but unsaved Jew who recognizes the beauty of the law of God, but is frustrated by his inability to live up to it.
5. He says in verse 14, "but I am carnal, sold under sin," but the believer is dead to sin (6:2, 11).
6. "Sold under sin" (7:14b) means enslaved to sin. The law cannot deliver carnal sinners enslaved to sin. The law condemns them.
7. "Carnal" (7:14) means "fleshly" (cf. 7:18). Henry Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon says the word "carnal" means, "under the control of the animal appetites."
8. W.H. Griffith Thomas said the point of this passage is that "it describes a man who is trying to be good and holy by his own efforts and is beaten back every time by the power of indwelling sin."
9. It should be emphasized that Romans 7:15 and 16 are not describing the normal Christian life. Romans 8 describes the normal Christian life (8:1).
10. It is tragic that some Christians misunderstand Romans 7, and use these words to justify living a sub-normal Christian life. No Christian should be content with a low standard of life, and to attribute his failures to Paul's statements in Romans 7 is to misinterpret the Word of God.
11. H.A. Ironside said, "And as to this being the normal experience of one already saved, I shall attempt to show as we go on with the study of chapters 7 and 8 that there is an orderly progression from the bewilderment of chapter 7 to the intelligence and walk in the Spirit of chapter 8. All Christians doubtless know something of the state depicted in verses 14-25 of chapter 7, but once out of it no one need ever go through it again."

12. "Sold under sin...what I hate, that I do" (7:14, 15) describe a desperate sinner who realizes the law cannot deliver him from his bondage. He cannot stop doing what he knows to be wrong.
13. The Roman poet Ovid said, "I see better things, and approve, but I follow worse." W.H. Griffith Thomas refers to this statement and says, "The pagan who used these words confessed that he practiced what he knew to be wrong, and that his inconsistency arose from his love of the evil. Paul here confesses wrongdoing, but instead of loving, he hates the evil."
14. When Paul declares in verse 17, "Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me," he is referring to the power of sin in the flesh, the power of indwelling sin.
15. Griffith Thomas said, "The Apostle's purpose is not to excuse himself or to explain his failings. He is only showing his wretched thralldom (bondage), that he finds a tyrant who compels him to act against his better self."

II. THE LAW OF SIN IN THE MEMBERS (7:23)

1. Paul says that while on the one hand he delighted in "the law of God after the inward man" (7:22), on the other hand he saw "another law" (7:23) in his members (of his body).
2. "Members" refers to the members of the body as the seat of the desires and passions. The human body in itself is not evil, but oftentimes the forces of evil work through it.
3. The Bible teaches that the human body was designed and created by God and is therefore beautiful. The Psalmist said, "I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well" (Psalm 139:14).
4. The human body in itself is not evil, but oftentimes the forces of evil work through its "members" (7:23; cf. 6:13, 19; 7:5).
5. That is why Paul said, "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (I Cor. 9:27).
6. Paul says this "law of sin" in his members waged war against the law of his mind and brought him into spiritual bondage (7:23).

III. THE LAW OF THE MIND (7:23)

1. We have noted that there are different laws mentioned in the book of Romans, especially here in chapter 7. The word "law" is found 78 times in the book of Romans, and 23 times in Romans chapter 7.
2. First and foremost there is "the law of God" (7:22, 25; 8:7). The law of God is the moral law (cf. 7:7).

3. Secondly there is "the law of sin" (7:23, 25; 8:2). The law of sin has reigned over man ever since Adam sinned. It works through our "members."
4. Then, there is "the law of the mind" (7:23), which refers to the moral sense in man. The law of sin wars against the law of the mind.
5. "The mind" refers to the immaterial part of man in contrast to his body. The mind has the capacity for perceiving and making moral judgments. How a man acts (whether good or bad), depends on what is in his mind (cf. 6:12, 13).
6. The mind refers to the organ of mental perception and apprehension, of the consciousness preceding actions or recognizing and judging them.
7. In a man's mind, if he knows something to be wrong, but yields to the flesh, then he does that which he "hates" (7:15-18).
8. The "mind" is not always spiritual and moral. That is why Romans 12:2 says, "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."
9. Likewise, "the inward man" in Romans 7:22 is not referring to the "new man" or the regenerate man. It is the immaterial part of man; his inner being.
10. Another term that should be defined is "the body of this death" (7:24). It is "the body of sin" referred to in Romans 6:6. Romans 5:12 explains the introduction of sin and death. Since the fall, man's body is a body of sin and a body of death.
11. Philip Mauro said, "The condition of man in the flesh under Law is concisely summed up in the last words of the chapter. 'So then with the MIND I myself serve the Law of God; but with the FLESH the law of sin.' In these few words all the prominent points of the passage under consideration are presented; namely, *first*, the distinction between the mind and the flesh; *second*, the complete subservience of the flesh to the law of sin, even in a case where the mind is subservient to the Law of God; *third*, the identification of the conscious personality ("I, myself") with the mind; *fourth*, the fact that, in the unconverted man, the flesh is master" (*The Wretched Man and His Deliverance*; emphasis in original).
12. "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God" (7:25a). But the flesh was still a problem, and the law was not able to control it (7:25b). "The law of sin" (7:25) was too powerful.
13. This brings us to Romans 8, where we see that the indwelling Holy Spirit has made us "free from the law of sin and death" (8:1, 2).

CONCLUSION:

I will conclude with a quote from Warren Wiersbe:

The old nature cannot do anything good. Everything the Bible says about the old nature is negative: "no good thing" (Romans 7:18); "the flesh profiteth nothing" (John 6:63); "no confidence in the flesh" (Philippians 3:3). If we depend on the energy of the flesh, we cannot serve God, please God, or do any good thing. But if we yield to the Holy Spirit, then we have the power needed to obey His will. The flesh will never serve the Law of God because the flesh is at war with God. But the Spirit can only obey the Law of God! Therefore, the secret of doing good is to yield to the Holy Spirit.

The Bible Exposition Commentary (Romans)