

The Goodness and Impotence of the Law – Part 3
Romans 7:14-25
July 23, 2020

Review

- Chs 5-8 The gospel and the sure hope it gives
- 5:1-11 Blessed results of justification
- 5:12-21 The reign of God’s grace in the second Adam, and how it is superior to the reign of sin through the first Adam
- Ch 6 The triumph of grace over the power of sin
- 7:1-8:17 The triumph of grace over the power of the law
- 7:1-6 The Christian has been released from the law in order to come under Christ’s authority and be joined to Him forever, and now serves God in the New Covenant way, the way of the Holy Spirit, not in the Old Covenant way, the way of the written code
- 7:7-13 The goodness and impotence of the law, as seen in the effect the law had upon Paul before he was joined to Christ
- 7:14-23 The goodness and impotence of the law, as seen in Paul’s inability as a Christian, in and of himself, to obey the law, even with a new heart that truly delights in it**
- 7:24-25 The cry of the Christian to his Savior to deliver him from “this body of death”**

Question: How would you summarize the difficulty described in verses 14-23?

The Christian delights in the law, but is unable in and of himself to obey it (14-23)

14 “For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.”

1. This verse marks the change from the past tense in vv 7-13 describing Paul’s life before being converted and his conversion, to the present tense in vv 14-25 describing Paul’s life as a Christian
2. The law is spiritual
3. The term, “the flesh,” was used in verse 5
 - In Romans 7, it means “fallen humanness” (also 13:14; Gal 5:13, 16-17, 19, 24)
 - Synonymous with the believer’s “old self” (6:6; Eph 4:22; Col 3:9)
 - Who we are apart from the saving work of God
4. “sold under sin”
5. This verse is striking, because it stands in great tension with 8:8-9 and 6:17-18

15 “For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.”

1. Paul is not characterizing his life in this way, but talking of something that he sometimes experiences, something from which he cannot free himself
2. The Christian is “of the flesh” in the sense that he still has the flesh to deal with. In and of himself, the Christian is utterly weak.
3. The Christian is “sold under sin” in the sense that he sometimes serves sin even though he hates sin and wants to do the opposite
4. When the Christian sins, he does not fully “understand” why he did so, being that he hates sin

16 “Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good.”

- The word ‘good’ can mean beautiful. The Christian agrees that the law is fundamentally good, that it is morally beautiful

17 “So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.”

1. Not a denial of the Christian’s responsibility for his sin (cf. 25b)
2. Paul is pinpointing the source of the Christian’s sin. The source is not the believer’s new nature. Because of his new nature, the believer now wants to obey God’s commandments. The source is “sin that dwells within me.”
3. Theologians use the synonymous terms, “indwelling sin” and “remaining sin”
4. Refers to a rebelliousness that remains within us after conversion until we see Christ.

5. Before conversion, indwelling sin completely reigned over us (verse 8). We did not fight against it. We just yielded to it.
6. At conversion, we received a new nature that delights in God's law and hates sin. This new nature is opposed to indwelling sin, and by the power of God we can resist indwelling sin, but we are unable to free ourselves from the presence of indwelling sin.

18 "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out."

- This truth should teach us to be humbly dependent upon the power of Christ

19–20 "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me."

21 "So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand."

1. NASB "evil is present in me"
2. NKJV "evil is present with me"

22–23 "For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members."

1. The believer's "inner being" and "mind" are synonymous. This part of the Christian is being renewed in sanctification
 - Rom. 12:2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by **the renewal of your mind**, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.
 - Eph. 4:21–23 assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be **renewed in the spirit of your minds**,
 - 2 Cor. 4:16 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.
2. The phrase, "the law of sin that dwells in my members," refers to indwelling sin, an inner compulsion to sin.
3. Paul connects indwelling sin with the members of our mortal body, a body that is wasting away. Though the body is not inherently evil, it is used by sin. We will not be free from the presence of indwelling sin until we no longer are in a body that is wasting away under the curse of sin.
4. A war is being waged within the Christian between the renewed mind and indwelling sin.
5. What the Christian ultimately needs in order to live for God is not more law, but the power of Christ

Question: What do verses 24-25 teach the Christian to do?

The Christian cries to his Savior to deliver him from the body of death (24-25)

24 “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”

1. “Wretched” is synonymous to “miserable.” In and of himself, the Christian is in a miserable condition
2. There is nothing the Christian can do to deliver himself from the flesh and indwelling sin
3. Reflects a great sensitivity to God’s holy law and one’s own sin, a great love for God and a deep hatred of one’s own sin
4. Reflects greater concern about our own sins than the sins of others
5. This view of God’s law, of the Christian’s inherent inability, and of the Christian’s sin is important for the process of sanctification

25a “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

1. He delivers us now in sanctification
2. He will deliver us in glorification
 - **Rom. 8:11** If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

25b “So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.”

- Until glorification, the Christian will both serve God and serve sin, though not to equal degrees

Conclusion

1. Victory against your sin comes only through the struggle spoken of in this passage
2. Do not make peace with your sin, but make war against it
 - A war that will be won in the end (ch 6, 8)
3. Fight the spiritual battle in full reliance upon the power of Christ
4. When you do sin, say...
 - “I love the law of God” (22)
 - “I hate what I just did” (15)
 - “Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from this body of death?” (24)
 - “Thanks be to God! The victory will come through Jesus Christ my Lord” (25)
5. Keep fighting the spiritual battle until your last breath. Only when we have finished the race may we rest from our warfare.