

## Showing How Deadly Sin Is (7:13)

7:13 *Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.*

- “That which is good” is God’s Law (7:12; see also Nehemiah 9:13; 1 Timothy 1:8).
- “...sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4b), and “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23a). Breaking God’s Law is sin, and the penalty for that is death.
- God’s “commandment” shines a spotlight on just how ugly sin is. The Law was not given to save us; we cannot be made right before God by obeying it. It was meant to show us we need a Savior, and are hopelessly lost without Him, no matter how religious or moral we are.

## The Life of a Dead Man (7:14-23)

### Slave to Sin (7:14)

7:14 *For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.*

- Who is Paul describing? Can a believer be said to be “sold into bondage to sin” (7:14), or to be “a prisoner of the law of sin” (7:23)?
- Can Paul say “sin...dwells in me” (7:17,20) when we read the testimony of 8:9,11 about Who dwells in believers?
- Paul is now describing his pre-conversion struggle as Saul of Tarsus, a Jewish Pharisee trying to be right before God by keeping the Law...a futile effort.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The shift from past-tense verbs in 7:1-13 to present-tense verbs in 7:14-25 is, I believe, an “historical present” or “dramatic present” tense. “The historical present is used fairly frequently in narrative literature to describe a past event...the reason for the use of the historical present is normally to portray an event vividly, as though

## The Dead Have No Free Will (7:15-20)

7:15 *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.*

7:16 *But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good.*

7:17 *So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.*

7:18 *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.*

7:19 *For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want.*

7:20 *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.*

### The Unsaved Legalist

- Before faith in Christ, Paul the Pharisee loved God’s Law and tried his best to live by it:
  - Paul testifying before a hostile crowd in Jerusalem, said, “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you all are today” (Acts 22:3); see also 26:5; Galatians 1:14; Philippians 3:4-6.
  - Paul’s fellow Jews who rejected Christ misunderstood the purpose of the Law: “...Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. Why? Because they

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the reader were in the midst of the scene as it unfolds.” Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), pg. 526.

*did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works...brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation. For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end [goal, purpose] of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Romans 9:31,32; 10:1-4).*

- “...the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do” (7:18,19). Only an unsaved legalist can say this. Before we come to Christ through repentant faith, the Bible says this about us: “There is none who does good, there is not even one” (3:12). The reality is different in Christ, though: **READ Ephesians 2:10; Philippians 2:12,13; Hebrews 13:20,21.** God works good through those who are His people in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Give thanks to God that He Who is good works good through you who have been born again by faith in His Son!

### What the Law of God Cannot Do (7:21-23)

<sup>7:21</sup>*I find then the principle [τὸν νόμον] that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good.*

<sup>7:22</sup>*For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man [κατὰ τὸν ἔσω ἄνθρωπον],*

<sup>7:23</sup>*but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind [τῷ νόμῳ τοῦ νοῦς] and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.*

- The “inner man” as opposed to the “outer man” (2 Corinthians 4:16; Ephesians 3:16) is the difference between our physical bodies and all their infirmities,

and the inner spirit of the Christian, which is growing day-by-day until glory. For the unbeliever, the “inner man” is totally controlled by the “outer man,” which is hopelessly enslaved to sin. The Christian, on the other hand, is free from sin’s control in the “outer man,” and is dominated by the spiritual “inner man.”

- Again, this is the testimony of the religious, unregenerate legalist who is trying to be saved by his/her own good works. This person may love morality and even the Law of God, but that’s not enough! They are in a losing battle. They are “a prisoner of the law of sin which is in [their] members.”
- A born-again Christian, on the other hand, fights a battle against their sin that doesn’t result in defeat – it results in growth. I think the sad result of interpreting this passage as being normal Christian experience is that believers use it to settle for a non-victorious life in their sanctification (becoming more holy). “Well,” they might say, “if Paul couldn’t defeat his sin, I surely can’t.” Paul is describing his experience as a Law-lover before Christ. **The life of the legalist is a life of frustrating, chronic defeat at the hands of our sin natures. This is not what Paul described for the baptized in Romans 6!**

### Impossible with Man, Possible with God (7:24)

#### Desperate Question and Thankful Answer (7:24,25a)

<sup>7:24</sup>*Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?* <sup>7:25a</sup>*Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!*

- 7:25a must be a parenthesis! He cannot be thanking “God through Jesus Christ our Lord” for the condition described in 7:25b! How could Paul give thanks to Father through the Son because his flesh is in servitude to “the law of sin”? Compare this thanksgiving with the one from the last chapter: “...thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form

of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness” (6:17,18). Paul cannot give thanks for continued servitude, and does not do so. We must maintain that there is a separation between the thanksgiving of 7:25a and the summation of 7:14-24 given in 7:25b.

- Paul breaks out in thankful doxology before even finishing his main thought – something he has done before (Romans 1:25). Think of this passage like this:  
7:22 *For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man,* 7:23 *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.* 7:24 *Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?*  
7:25a *Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!*  
7:25b *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.*
- You, Christian, can sing Paul’s “parenthesis”!

### Summing Up the Impossible (7:25b)

7:25b *So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind [voù, from voùς] am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.*

- “So then,” having injected a brief statement of thanksgiving, Paul returns to his previous train of thought.
- Let’s read this text together with what follows: “7:25b...on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, **with my flesh** [I am serving] **the law of sin.** 8:1 *Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* 8:2 *For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.*” How can 7:25b and 8:2 both be said of those

saved in Christ? How can they be serving “the law of sin” and, at the same time, be “free from the law of sin”?

### Believers and Battle with Sin

- Yes, believers in Christ face a battle with sin. But we are not “of flesh, sold into bondage to sin” (7:14), nor are we “a prisoner of the law of sin” (7:23).  
**Remember your baptism!** “...do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death...we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death...our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin” (6:3-7). In Christ, we have “been freed from sin” and become “slaves of righteousness” (6:18), we have “been freed from sin and enslaved to God” (6:22).
- READ Galatians 5:16-25.** This is not the same as Paul’s argument in Romans 7 because of Galatians 5:16. A person who walks in the Spirit (as Paul commands) will not fulfill the lust of the flesh. Romans 7 speaks of a failing servitude to sin. In addition, the Holy Spirit is not mentioned in Romans 7. Galatians 5 speaks of crucifying the flesh and its lusts; the man of Romans 7 cannot kill his flesh, but is in servitude to it.
- READ 1 Corinthians 9:26,27.** This is a man beating his flesh (sin nature) into submission; far from the man of Romans 7, who is defeated by his flesh.

“The man in Romans 7:14-25 is struggling against sin’s power and he desires to obey God’s law. But he is utterly defeated by the power of indwelling sin. This is not true of the Christian who, while he too experiences a struggle against sin (Gal. 5:16-18), is

**described as victorious in his struggle against sin’s power because of his new master, the indwelling Spirit of Christ.”<sup>2</sup>**

## **Rejoice That This is Not Your Story Anymore!**

### **Remember Your Baptism**

- True Christian baptism is believer's baptism, the baptism of a person who has repented of their sins and trusted Jesus alone for their salvation.<sup>3</sup>
- READ again the lesson Paul wants us to remember about our baptism in Romans 6:1-23. Instead of slaves to sin, baptized believers are victorious warriors against sin through their service to God in Christ.

### **Remember the Cup at the Table**

- At the Lord's Supper Table, we declare the words of Christ with the cup: *“This cup is the new covenant in My blood”* (1 Corinthians 11:25; see also Luke 22:20). God's first promise in that *“new covenant”* is *“I will put My Law within them and on their heart I will write it”* (Jeremiah 31:33).<sup>4</sup> This

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<sup>2</sup> Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), pg. 1130.

<sup>3</sup> “Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer’s faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Savior, the believer’s death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead. Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord’s Supper” (Baptist Faith & Message 2000, VII).

<sup>4</sup> What comes with this promise in the new covenant? God promises to be our God and that we will be His people (31:33). He promises that everyone in the covenant will know Him (31:34, which is why infant baptism is not valid...babies who do not know Him cannot be

Spirit-wrought heart-change is what makes Christians the true Jewish people (Romans 2:29; Philippians 3:1-3; Colossians 2:11,12). Those who have been given a new Spirit-enlivened heart through faith in Christ are given that heart to have victory over sin and obey what God commands in His Word:

- *“...the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live...and you shall again obey the LORD, and observe all His commandments which I command you today”* (Deuteronomy 30:6,8).
- READ Ezekiel 11:19,20; 36:26,27.

### **Believe What the Bible Says About You**

- *“...if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come”* (2 Corinthians 5:17). I think one of the reasons we are not as victorious over sin as we can be is because we do not read the promises of newness and victory in Christ from the Bible; and when we do read them, we are weak in faith and regard sin as greater than these truths!
  1. Read these promises. Write them where you can see them often. Memorize them.
  2. Pray, *“increase my faith”* (Luke 17:5), and, *“I do believe, help my unbelief”* (Mark 9:24)!
  3. Claim these promises in prayer to God, and ask for His power and grace by His Spirit in the name of Jesus to make these words a reality in your Christian walk.
  4. Give thanks, as Paul does, for what God has promised to do in you through Christ. Rejoice!

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baptized into covenant with Him). He promises that those in the covenant will have their sins forgiven by Him (31:34).