

Wretched Man

Let us read the text of Romans that will be addressed in this lesson:

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

Romans 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.

Romans 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.

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

Romans 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.

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

Romans 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.

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So let us start by examining the text of the individual verses.

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

We know. This is one of the words for knowing. It has the nuance of seeing and understanding. There is a small textual issue here. Some manuscripts have “I know.” The overwhelming evidence is for “we know.”

The Law is spiritual. The Law is the Mosaic Law. There are a lot of non-Spiritual things that happen in the Pentateuch/Torah. But the message from the Torah is spiritual. We saw last week and other weeks that the Torah can lead us toward salvation but cannot in and of itself provide salvation. We cannot be saved by keeping the Law. The Law says we are sinful and in need of salvation from God. Starting in Genesis 3:15 God points to the solution that He has promised and provided. In the Old Testament it is the promise. In the New Testament it is an accomplished fact that God was faithful and provided the means of salvation based upon the work of Jesus Christ on the Cross and subsequent resurrection. We trust in Jesus Christ, His work on the cross, for salvation.

I am of flesh. Here is a contrast between the Law, which just by existing causes me to sin but at the same time it is perfect and spiritual.

Sold into bondage. Here is another depiction of the slave market of sin. This bondage to sin started with the sin of Adam.

At this point, the reader must be reminded of the structure of a human being.

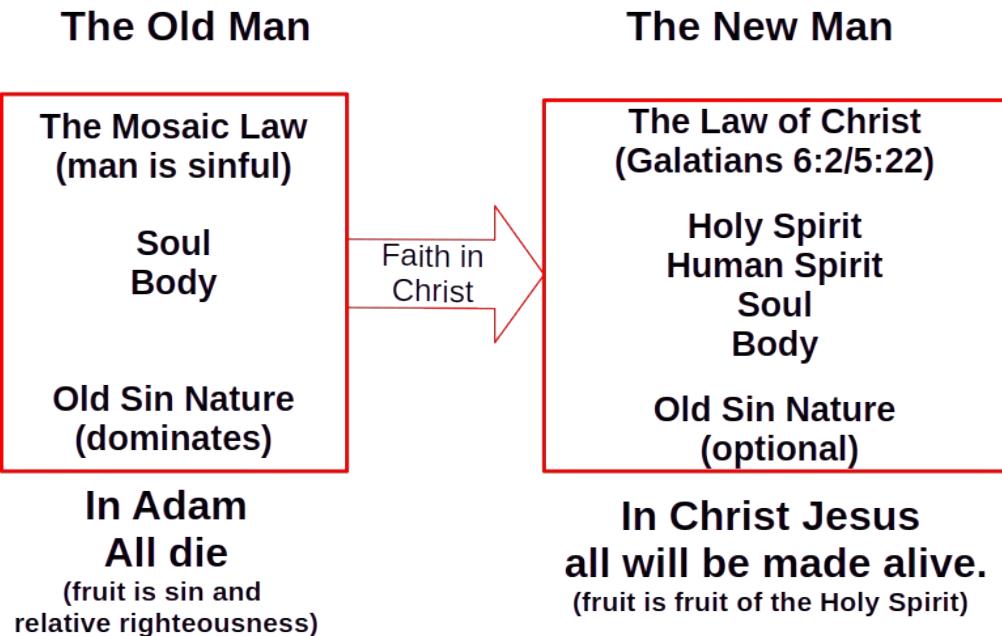
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The unbeliever has only soul and body. He is sometimes called “dichotomous” because there are only two elements. Part of the body is the sin nature. It dwells in the flesh.

The believer is “trichotomous.” He has a body, soul and human spirit. Included is the indwelling Holy Spirit. Yet, the believer, in his fleshly body still has a sin nature. So when we are out of fellowship, we place ourselves at the disposal of the sin nature. Paul pointed this out in the first letter to the Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 3:1 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ.



They are believers “in Christ.” But they are voluntarily under the control of the sin nature which dwells in the flesh. Their spiritual state is emphasized by the reference to “infants” in Christ. Without Bible doctrine, a Christian is clueless as to living the Christian life. One pastor said that most churches in the US do not teach Bible doctrine. As such the vast majority of Christians today do not know how to live the

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Christian life. He quoted someone else as saying that our churches today are like nurseries for baby Christians. But they are not getting spiritual food.

In Romans chapter 7, Paul is emphasizing this fact that all believers in the Church Age have an active sin nature. By the end of chapter seven we will find ourselves practically begging Paul for the solution which he faithfully produces in chapter 8.

Romans 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.

There are three words in this single verse for the concept of “doing.” Some would say they are synonyms. Paul doesn’t just throw in synonyms to make his text sound nice. Each word has a slightly different nuance even if they are considered synonyms. Each one adds something the other does not. Here in the NASB, the first word translated “doing” is focused more on a result of doing. It is sometimes translated “produce.” The Phillips translation has a good perspective: “behavior.” It is the result of what my flesh or sin nature produces, bad behavior. The second word is translated correctly in the NASB: “practicing.” The third word is translated simply as “do.”

For what I am producing (my behavior), I don’t understand; for I am not practicing what I want but doing the thing I hate.

I do not understand. The Greek word is the simple word for knowing. Wuest would say this is experiential knowledge. *Ginosko*. Yet, in this context it leans toward the word for understanding. I think the NASB got it right. When I saw this, I thought of a movie quote, “What just happened?” Or as Phillips translates, it “baffles me.”

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Here is an interesting translation that gets the flow of what Paul is saying. It is the Phillips translation.

Romans 7:14-15 After all, the Law itself is really concerned with the spiritual—it is I who am carnal, and have sold my soul to sin. In practice, what happens? My own behaviour baffles me. For I find myself not doing what I really want to do but doing what I really loathe.

Romans 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.

Paul emphasizes that the Law is good. We know this from past lessons.

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

Dwells. There are words used in the Bible that help describe a situation. Here we have a word that identifies the location of the sin nature. It dwells in me. In this context it refers to the location as in the flesh.

But beyond the context, the word itself describes an individual. The word is derived from the same root as “house.” This house is the individual.

Paul does something similar in another passage.

2 Corinthians 5:1 For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

2 Corinthians 5:2 For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven,

2 Corinthians 5:3 inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked.

2 Corinthians 5:4 For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life.

2 Corinthians 5:5 Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge.

The verb form of tent is used of Jesus

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The term “dwelt” is derived from the word for tent. He “tent”ed among us. Also remember that the Ark of the Covenant was kept in the “Tabernacle” or “tent.”

The point of this discussion is that our bodies are like tents. They are temporary dwelling places.

Paul says that we will have a replacement for our tents, our physical bodies. We know that we will have a resurrection body.

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This discussion started because Paul used a word for house as the residence of the sin nature.

Romans 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.

Dwells. Again a word rooted in the concept of “house.” There is nothing good “housed” in me.

There is nothing inherent in a human being that is good enough for God to save him. But in response to our faith, God provides His righteousness, His goodness.

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

In the Old Testament, when we studied the book of Judges, we encountered “evil.” This was identified as anything (thoughts and deeds) that were against God.

Romans 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.

Paul is pointing to a part of his being. It is like saying the car wanted to go to the store. The problem was the engine was malfunctioning.

Romans 7:21 I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good.

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Romans 7:22 For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man,

Romans 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.

You have a sin nature. When you either consciously or unconsciously reject grace and engage in sin, the sin nature has free reign to get you into trouble. Ever gossip about someone when you knew that doing so was sin but you did it anyway? You didn't really want to do it but the story was so juicy you just had to tell someone. There is often a war within us between what we know is good and the sin nature.

Romans 7:24 Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?

Wretched.

Here is info from Biblehub.com

“The word describes the deep inward misery of a soul that has come face-to-face with its own spiritual poverty. It is not merely emotional discouragement; it is a moral and spiritual wretchedness that cries out for deliverance. Scripture employs the term to expose self-reliance and to drive the heart toward the grace of God in Jesus Christ.¹”

The sin nature which dwells in my physical body is one issue in the Christian life. The solution to the operation of the sin nature is found in chapter 8.

¹ <https://biblehub.com/greek/5005.htm>

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Romans 7:25 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.

This is the final pointer to chapter 8, the solution.

Thomas Constable has some useful comments here.

“This chapter is very important for several reasons. First, it corrects the popular idea that our struggle with sin is only against specific sins and habits whereas it is also against our basic human nature. Second, it shows that human nature is not essentially good but bad. Third, it argues that progressive sanctification does not come by obeying laws, which is a form of legalism called nomism, but it comes apart from law. It also proves that doing right requires more than just determining to do it. All of these insights are necessary in order for us to appreciate what Paul proceeded to explain in chapter 8.²”

He also has an interesting table comparing chapters 6 and 7³:

2 <https://soniclight.com/tcon/notes/pdf/romans.pdf> p160-161

3 <https://soniclight.com/tcon/notes/pdf/romans.pdf> p171-172

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Chapter	Six	Seven
Subject	The believer's relationship to sin	The believer's relationship to the Law
Our former condition	Enslavement to sin (cf. 6:1-11)	Obligation to the Law (of Moses; cf 7:1-6)
Our present condition	No longer slaves of sin (cf. 6:12-14)	No longer obligated to keep the Law (cf. 7:7-12)
Our present danger	Becoming slaves to sin by yielding to it (cf. 6:15-18)	Becoming incapable of overcoming the flesh by trying to keep the Law (cf. 7:13-24)
Our present responsibility	Present ourselves to God and our members as His instruments (cf. 6:19-23)	Trust and obey God who alone can enable us to overcome the flesh (cf. 7:25ff)

If we have time, let us open our Bibles and read Romans chapter 8.