Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Believer and Indwelling Sin, Part 1
Scripture: Romans 7:14-17
Code: 45-52

Let's open our Bibles and look together at Romans chapter 7. Romans chapter 7. I want to read as the setting for our message verses 14 through verse 25. Romans chapter 7 beginning at verse 14.

"For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I understand not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that *it is* good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but *how* to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.

"I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin."

That is a poignant description of someone in conflict with himself, someone who loves God's moral law, someone who deep down in his innermost self wants to obey God's moral law, but is pulled and pushed away from its fulfillment by sin, sin that is in him. It is the personal experience of a soul in conflict. It is a battle. It is a warfare that rages in the heart. The conflict is very real. It is very intense. It is very strong. Of that there is no mistake.

It finds its summation in verse 25 - or verse 24 - "O wretched man that I am." There is a wretchedness about this battle. There is a wretchedness about this conflict. And then the cry, "Who shall deliver me?" And then the affirmation. "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." But even knowing that, it concludes, "So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin."

Now some people say this is a Christian being described. And some people say this is a non-Christian. And people have been saying those two things ever since Romans 7 was written. Whole movements have depended for their very life on the interpretation of Romans 7. One side says there is too much bondage to sin for a Christian. The other says there's too much desire for good for a non-Christian. You can't be a Christian and be bound to sin and you can't be a non-Christian and desire to keep the law of God. And therein is the conflict of interpreting the passage.

Let's talk about the non-Christian view for a moment. And it will probably take us a couple of weeks to do this, so we'll be patient. Not just to talk about the two views, but to get through the passage. The non-Christian view. Now the people who want us to believe that this is speaking of a non-Christian say verse 14 is the key. "I am carnal, sold under sin." And so, they would say that has to be an unbeliever.

And then verse 18. "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but *how* to perform that which is good I find not." And they say that has to be a non-Christian because a person who's a Christian knows how to do what's good. Where's the evidence of the Holy Spirit's power there? And so they question the very obvious ignorance of the person in verse 18 not able to figure out how to get his results that he wants. Should one in Christ be so impotent?

And then again verse 24. "O wretched man that I am," seems rather far from the promise of 5:1, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ, our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." And then he goes on to talk about the fact that we not only have the hope and the joy, but all the benefits. How can this man be so wretched with so many benefits? How can he be carnal, sold under sin, when 6:14 says "sin shall not have dominion over you"?

And then they invariably go into chapter 6 in detail. For example, 6:2. "How shall we that are dead - " or have died " - to sin live any longer in it?" Verse 6. "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with *Him,* that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." Verse 7. "For he that has died is freed from sin." Verse 11. "Reckon yourselves to have died indeed unto sin." Verse 12. "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body." Verse 17. "God be thanked, that whereas you were the servants of sin, you have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered." Verse 18. "Being then made free from sin." Verse 22. "But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God."

Now with all of that in chapter 6, how in the world can it be said in 7:14, "I am carnal, sold under sin," is a Christian? You understand the problem? Now, we'll deal with each one of these things as we go through the passage. But here let me just say in general reference to chapter 6 that the emphasis in chapter 6 is on the new creation, the new nature, the new identity, the new person in Christ, the redeemed I. The emphasis, therefore, is on the holiness of the believer. And in his new creation, and in his redeemed self, he has broken sin's dominion.

The emphasis in chapter 7 does not necessarily have to be the same as in chapter 6. And every Christian knows that even though he is new in Christ, and sin's dominion is broken, and sin no longer has mastery over him, sin is still a problem. And so whether or not you want to see a Christian in chapter 7, you've still got to see a Christian having conflict with sin even though his new creation, his

new self is holy.

And that is why it's so important to understand what we taught in chapter 6, that that which is recreated is the new I. And that new redeemed self is holy. But there's still going to be a conflict. And whether you see that conflict in chapter 7 or not, there is still a conflict, and it is pointed out, may I add, even in chapter 6. Notice 6:12. "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that you should obey its lusts."

Now wait a minute. You just said we died to sin, you just said that the sin - the body of sin, verse 6 - was destroyed and we would henceforth not serve sin. Now why in verse 12 are you commanding us not to let it reign? You see, you have the same problem in chapter 6. You still have to deal with the problem of the believer and sin. And in all that Paul said in chapter 6 about our new nature, and our new creation, and our new essence, he never said that from then on we wouldn't have a battle with sin. Verse 12 implies that sin could still have a reigning place. It could still be shouting out orders which we are submitting to. We could still be obeying sin. Follow into verse 13. "Neither yield ye your members *as* instruments of unrighteousness unto sin." Which is to say you could do that. And so you have to be commanded not to do that.

So, on the one hand, the problem in chapter 7 is the problem in chapter 6, because you have all of those statements about you've died to sin, you're dead to sin, sin has no dominion over you, your service to sin is broken, you are now servants of God and you're free from sin, you're free from sin. At the same time, you have the commands to not let sin reign over you. So there are no problems found in the interpretation of chapter 7 that aren't also found in the interpretation of chapter 6.

Look at 6:19. "I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh." Now remember what we said about that? When you sin, it isn't the new you, what is it? It's your flesh, your humanness. And so he says, "I have to remind you of these things because your flesh is still there, for as you have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and iniquity unto iniquity in the past, even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness." And the implication again there is you could yield your members to sin. You could yield your members to sin.

So, arguing that chapter 7 cannot refer to a Christian because of statements in chapter 6 is to really to misunderstand the intention of chapter 6. And I think it to be a rather weak argument.

Now let's look at 7:14-25 and look at it as if it were a Christian - as if it were a Christian in view. Verse 22. "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man." That's a very strong statement, isn't it? "I delight in the law of God after the inward man."

On the other side, we ask the question, does an unbeliever delight in the law of God after the inward man? You don't find such indication in the Scripture. In fact, in Romans 8:7, the middle of the verse, it

says that the unregenerate person is not subject to the law of God. Not subject to the law of God.

Look at verse 25. “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God.” That sounds like a Christian to me for two reasons: Thanking God through Jesus Christ our Lord, and serving the law of God with his mind. It’s a service of the heart. It’s the service of the deepest part of man. And I remind you of what it says in chapter 8 again that the one who is apart from Christ cannot be subject to the law of God.

Now look back at verse 15. “For that which I do I know not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.” You know what that says? To me that says that there is a battle here, because the deepest truest part of this individual wants to do what is right, but something keeps him from doing it. Is that true of an unsaved person? That they really long to do what is right but are inexplicably prevented from doing it? Not according to Jeremiah, who said “the heart of man is deceitful above all things and - ” what? “ - desperately wicked.” Look at verse 18. “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwells no good thing: for to will is present with me; but *how* to perform that which is good I find not.” And again, it’s the same idea. Something deep inside me wants to do what is right.

You have it in verse 19. “For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that do I.” You have it in verse 21. “I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.” So the heart, and the soul, and the mind, and deep within the individual longs to do what is good. The bent is toward good. But there is an evil principle there that causes that to be not so easily accomplished.

Whoever this is - get this - he longs to do good things and finds himself doing - what? - bad things. As far as I can read Romans, chapter 3, the evil person has no longing to do the will of God. “There is none good, no not one.” In Romans 3 he says everything about them is bad, everything. “There is none that understands. There is none that seeketh after God.” Verse 11. Nobody seeks God’s purposes, God’s holy will, God’s holy moral law. “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” They have no regard for Him or His law.

The conflict here, the tension, the battle between what Paul says, “I delight in, I love, I approve, I want, I long to do,” and that that he actually does, I believe, can only be true in a redeemed person. I don’t really think in an unregenerate person, an unredeemed person, an unsaved person that there really is much of a battle at all. I mean, we don’t believe for a moment that people without God are basically really good people who just can’t seem to pull it off. We believe they’re really evil people who act out the evil that’s inside them.

Now another question comes up at this point. And this has been an equally furious debate. Okay, let’s say it’s a Christian, just to make MacArthur happy, let’s say it’s a Christian. What kind of Christian is it? Some people say it’s a description of a Christian on a low, low level of spirituality. I mean, this guy hasn’t even figured out what’s going on. He’s trying in his own strength to keep the law.

One writer says this is the abject misery of failure of a Christian who attempts to please God under the Mosaic system, sort of a super-legalistic kind of Christian trying to crank out his own righteousness and he's unable to do it in his own flesh.

Well, is it a legalistic Christian? Is it a low-level sort of self-righteous Christian? I frankly don't think so. And the reason I don't think so is because those kinds of Christians usually don't have this kind of perception. If you ever learn anything about a legalist, you will always learn that they are under the illusion that they are very, very spiritual. Never for a minute do they think they're like this.

You know what kind of Christian this is? My friend, this is the most mature spiritual Christian there could ever be, who sees so clearly the inability of his flesh as over against the holiness of the divine standard. You see? And the more mature he is, and the more spiritual he is, the greater will be the sensitivity of his own shortcomings. You show me an infantile, "carnal," fleshly, legalistic, self-righteous kind of Christian, and I'll show you somebody who lives under the disillusion that everything he's doing is really very spiritual. You show me a person with this kind of brokenness, you show me a person agonizing in the depths of his own soul because he can't do everything written in the law of God, and I'll show you a spiritual person.

And so, I believe, what you have here is Paul. That's right, Paul. And you see the word "I" 46 times in this portion of Scripture, in Romans 7, if I remember correctly. Don't count them now. Anyway, he says it a lot. And I think what you have - some people say, "Well, this was Paul before he was saved. This was Paul when he just got saved, and he was infantile, and he was still sort of carnal." I think this is Paul at the very heights of his Christian perception. This is Paul at the level of maturity. And what he sees is that he does not live up to the holy law of God, though he desires it with all his heart. And he finds himself debilitated by that ugly reality that sin in its residual reality is still hanging on. And that is a profoundly sensitive realization.

In 1 Corinthians 15:9, he says the same thing in other terms. "For I am the least of the apostles, that am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am." You see that? He didn't say, "I wasn't fit to be an apostle. He said - what? - "I am not fit now to be an apostle. I am the least of all."

In Ephesians 3:8, "Unto me," he says, "who am less than the least." Now he's going down the drain further. He just used to be the least, now he's less than the least. You see, the man, the more the man perceives himself as over against the holy law of God, though in our judgment relative to other men he is the supreme man, he in his own mind is less than the least of all saints.

I draw you to 1 Timothy 1:12. "And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, in that He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor,

and injurious." You say, "Well, sure that's what he was - " "But I obtained mercy, because I did *it* ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." Then this, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I - " what? - was chief " - am chief. Nevertheless, for this cause I obtained mercy."

Listen, I think that's exactly what he's saying in Romans 7. This is Paul far along in his apostleship, mature in the Lord, walking in the dynamic of spiritual life, having experienced the mighty power of God, and the wisdom of God, and the knowledge of God. And the more he knows, and the more he experiences, the more he hates the sin that he sees hanging on. And the terms that he uses in Romans 7 are so precise that I think we can't miss this picture.

Whoever this person is, he hates sin. Verse 15. "I hate it," he says. Whoever this person is, he loves righteousness. Verses 19 and 21. "I would do good." Whoever this person is, he delights in the law of God from the bottom of his heart. Verse 22. Whoever this person is, he deeply regrets his sins. Verse 15, 18, 24. "O wretched man." Whoever this person is, he thanks God for the deliverance that is his in Jesus Christ our Lord. Don't tell me this man is not a Christian.

The Christian, then, lives in two extremes. He holds them in tension. Temporarily, he lives in this world as a man of flesh and blood subject to the conditions of mortal life. He is a son of Adam. Adam is his fellow, and all other men as well, who inherited the sinful seed. But spiritually, he has passed from darkness to light, from death to life. He now shares in Christ's death, burial, resurrection, and is now the possessor of an incorruptible eternal seed, the divine nature. He is a new creation. He is no longer in Adam. He is in Christ. But sin hangs on in his humanness, and so he is conscious of the presence and power of indwelling sin, and he despises it, and he hates it, and he loathes it, because he has tasted of the incorruptible seed. This is the man in Romans 7.

Now just to reinforce this, there is a rather dramatic change in the verb tenses in the chapter. The verbs from 7:7-13 are in the past tense, and I believe they speak before his conversion. And we went through that in detail to point out that this was his preconversion conviction experience when he was face to face with the law of God. And the verbs are in the past tense, aorist. As soon as you hit verse 14, they are in the present tense, right down through verse 25. The change in the verb tense is a very important linguistic note. It tells us Paul has moved out of the past before he was redeemed, into the present.

There is also a very interesting change in circumstance relative to sin. From verses 7 to 13, sin kills him. Sin slays him. He says that in verse 11. "Sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew *me*." Sin killed him. It killed all his self-righteousness, all his hopes, all of his securities. When he found out he was really a sinner seeing the law of God, it just devastated him, it just wiped him out. Sin killed him.

But all of a sudden when you come to verse 14, he is fighting sin and he will not let it kill him. He will not give in to it. And so I believe this is Paul's own testimony of how it is to live as a Spirit-controlled mature believer who loves with all of his heart the precious, beautiful, holy, majestic law of God, and finds himself wrapped in human flesh, and unable to fulfill the law of God the way his heart wants him to.

I also believe that in this section he continues his discussion of the law, and he is affirming, as we saw last time, to the Jew that there's nothing wrong with the law. The law can't save. We saw that. The law can't sanctify. But it's still good because it does what? It convicts of what? Sin. And that is true before you're saved, and guess what? It's true afterwards.

And I believe in 7:14-25 he's following the same argument. That's why the word "for" appears in verse 14. It just flows right along, just as sin did not obviate the goodness of the law before he was saved, it does not obviate the goodness of the law after he's saved. The law reveals sin to be sinful before you're saved and it reveals sin to be sinful after you're saved.

You know, when you become a Christian and you read about sin in the Bible, are you less concerned about your sin because you're now a Christian? No, you should be - what? - more concerned about it. And the law will always reveal it. When David said, "Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin," he was saying that the Word of God in the heart becomes the point of conviction. It isn't just information. You understand that? We don't go through life just needing information. We need conviction. And the law has that power.

So, while telling us that the law cannot save and the law cannot sanctify, he affirms that it is good, and holy, and just because it does convict of sin before you're saved and brings you to Christ and after you're saved so that you'll understand God's holy standard and long with all your heart to fulfill it. The problem is not the law. The problem is us. Pogo said it, "We have met the enemy and he is us."

Now the pattern of the text, let's approach. Verse 14. It is a picture of the indwelling sin in the life of a believer. And we will try to explain some of the difficulties as we go. But, I felt that giving you that general look at the start would sort of set things in motion. This is a very poignant passage. It is a rare passage in the Bible because it does something that rarely happens, and I cannot think of another passage that does this, just off hand. What it is is a series of laments. It is a series of plaintive cries. It is a series of desperate, sorrowful dirges. And they are repetitious. There is one, and then there is two, and then there is a third. And they basically say the very same thing three times. This is the cry of a broken heart, of a distressed soul, of a soul in great conflict.

Now, each of these three laments follows the same pattern. Paul describes his condition, gives proof of it, and then describes the source of it. He describes his condition, gives the proof that he's in that

condition, and then the source of his problem.

Let's look at the first lament, verses 14-17, and we may spend a little more time on the first because having interpreted that one, the rest will just be apparent to us. The condition is in verse 14, and he starts each one of the laments with a condition. The first one begins in verse 14, the second one begins in verse 18, and the third one begins in verse 20. And each begins with a statement of the condition. "For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am fleshy, sold under sin."

The word "for" tells us Paul is not introducing a new subject. He's continuing the same subject from the prior passage, that is the goodness of the law, the virtue of the law, in that it shows us our sin. The problem isn't the law. The problem is us. And the reason he's talking about the law is because the questioners who would have questioned his teaching would have said, "Well, when you preach salvation by grace through faith apart from law, you are speaking evil of the law. You're devaluing the law." And he says not at all. The law is good. I'm sinful. The law does a good work. It doesn't save and it doesn't sanctify, but it does convict of sin.

So he says, "we know then that the law is spiritual. But I am fleshy, sold under sin." He begins with a straightforward affirmation that the law is spiritual. What does he mean? It comes from the Spirit of God. It comes from God Himself. Thus it reflects the holy divine nature of God. Just like he said in verse 12 - remember that? "Wherefore the law *is* holy, and the commandment *is* holy, and just, and good."

Now again, let me remind you that I think you have to have here the testimony of a regenerate man. I do not see that unregenerate, unredeemed, ungodly people who do not know Jesus Christ have such perception of God's holy law. In verse 18 he says the same thing, really. "I want to do God's law." In verse 19, "I want to do God's law." In verse 21, "I want to do God's law." Verse 22. "I delight in God's law." I don't see such a delight in an unregenerate man's heart.

But Paul then goes on to say, "I've got a barrier to doing this, even though the law is spiritual." Here's the contrast. I am fleshy, *sarkinos*. I am human. I am earthbound. I am physical. He doesn't say "I am in the flesh." He doesn't say "I am totally controlled by the flesh." That's not true. Look at 7:5. "For when we were in the flesh, the sinful impulses, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death." We were in the flesh. I'm not in the flesh anymore. Verse 8 of chapter 8. "So then they that are in the flesh - " and you need to underline "in the flesh" in 7:5, and 8:8. "In the flesh" is an unregenerate condition. And his terms are very precise here. "In the flesh" is an unregenerate, unredeemed position. He says, "I am not in the flesh." But he says, "I'm fleshy." I'm fleshy. I'm carnal.

You say, "Can a Christian be that way?" Listen to this, 1 Corinthians 3:1. "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, *even* as unto babes in Christ." Verse 3. "For ye

are yet carnal: for whereas *there is* among you envying, and strife, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?" He says to the Corinthian Christians, "You're carnal. You're fleshy. You're acting in a sinful, fleshly way."

We are not in the flesh - but listen - the flesh is still in us. We're no longer in the flesh in terms of being captive to it. Now look at verse 18. "For I know - " Romans 7:18 " - For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwells no good thing." He says the flesh is still there. I'm not in it, but it's still in me. And verse 25. "With the mind I serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin."

You're no longer in the flesh. The flesh is in you. And that is simply a term for our humanness. It could be the same term as 6:12. "Let not sin therefore reign in your - " what? " - mortal body." It doesn't reign in your mind. It's a renewed mind, that he's using the word "mind" that way in Romans 7. It doesn't reign in your new creation, your new nature. It reigns in your mortal body. And so his terms are very consistent.

Sin is in our humanness. That's why, beloved, I told you this a few weeks ago, when you die you go immediately to heaven cause you've already been fit for heaven, all you have to do is get rid of the flesh. And when you leave the body, that's the only issue you have to deal with.

Now any Christian could make the statement in verse 14. People have problems with this. Let me see if I can make it simple. I'm fleshy. Could you say that? I could say that. I mean, it's true. You say, "Yes. But you're certainly not talking in technical theological terms." No, no, no. I'm just saying I'm - could I say as a Christian I'm a sinner saved by grace? I'm still a sinner? God help me if I don't. If I say, "Well, since I've been saved I no longer sin," my wife will be up here to give testimony.

You see, the point is I can say that, I can say I'm fleshy, or fleshly, carnal. There are things in me that represent that. I get angry. I get irritated. I don't fulfill my duty as I ought to all the time. I don't maintain the diligence that I should in the pursuit of God that I desire. I see my humanness, my fleshliness getting in the way of the accomplishment of all of the things that I ought to do. I'm insensitive to people when they need my gentleness and I'm not gentle, when they need my kindness and I'm not kind, and so forth. I see myself as human. I see myself as sinful. I don't always speak godly to everyone who speaks to me in the way that I should. We can all say this. It's a general statement.

And then comes this one, and this seems to be the real Waterloo for the interpreters, "sold under sin." Now you really have a strong statement. Now, wait a minute. If we got delivered from sin, how could we be sold under sin?

Well, look at verse 23. " I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin." Bringing me into captivity to the law of sin. Very interesting

statement. And when I get there, I'm going to tell you what it means. I can hardly resist not telling you now, but I'm going to do that.

But what he is saying here is the same thing. "I was brought into captivity to the law of sin," verse 23. "Sold under sin," verse 14. What does he mean? Well, the Greek actually says "sold under the sin" - the sin principle - the sin reality, not so much deeds, but I see myself still as being sold under sin. There's a sense in which I still have a certain bondage. Now keep in mind, in chapter 6 he was talking about your new creation and that new creation pure eternal seed, incorruptible, eternal, the divine nature, the new nature, all that you are in Jesus Christ, holy, pure, undefiled, and righteous by the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ, that is not what he's talking about here. He's saying I - not my new nature, but I in general - see myself as sold under sin.

And then in verses 23 and 25 he calls it the "law of sin which is in my - " what? " - my members." And again his terms are consistent. The members have to do with the bodily members, the physical, the fleshly and it even goes beyond the physical to the emotions, the feeling, the mind, the thinking. But it's always the members, the body, the flesh, it's in our humanness.

Can this lament come from a Christian? I am fleshy, sold under sin. How about this, Psalm 51:5? David said - just listen to it. "Surely I have been a sinner from birth, a sinner from the time my mother conceived me." Now that sounds like a man whose never been redeemed, doesn't it? But had David? Oh yes. He's simply looking at one reality about himself. It is a perception, beloved. And here is a mature Christian. Here is a man who looks at his life and we would be the first ones to say, "Hey, you know, you've got to upgrade your self image, fella. This is terrible talk."

It is reminiscent, frankly, of Isaiah chapter 6, who comes before God and he's there worshiping God, and he sees this great vision of God, and he says, "Curse me. Woe is me - " which means curse me, condemn me, damn me, God, " - for I am a man with a dirty mouth and I live amidst a people with dirty mouths." And all the prophet can see as over against the glorious holiness of God is his own sin. And here is the maturity of the apostle Paul, who now understands how spiritual the law is, and he used to think it was something external, didn't he? And he didn't know it was talking about the heart. And that's why the law about lusting and coveting in the heart, verse 7, really hit him and killed him. And now he sees that the law is a deep, and profound, and spiritual thing, a holy thing - verse 12 - a just thing, a good thing. And as he really understands the law of God and he looks at himself, he sees I am fleshy. It is a perception that is legitimate.

It's the same thing he meant in 1 Timothy 1 when he said, "Of whom I am - " what? " - chief." It's only a question of perception. Not only can a Christian say that he has a bondage to sin, though redeemed, because we do have a bondage to sin. Can you break the bondage to sin that you have? Not in this life. Not in this life. And the more spiritual you are, the more mature you are, the more likely you are to say this.

So “sold under sin” doesn’t - we don’t have to get carried away with the terms - it doesn’t mean he actively sold himself to sin to commit sin, such as is said about Ahab in 1 Kings 20, and of the idolatrous Israelites in 2 Kings 17. It isn’t that he went out and sold himself into sin. It’s that he recognizes that there is a bondage there.

And you know, there have been times when you’ve been the captive of sin. I’ll tell you when the times are. Every time you sin. Every time you sin, you lost the battle, sin took you captive, right? And so, Paul puts all our feelings into words by articulating the basis of the conflict inside the believer. And we all understand this perception. We can all see that there’s sin in our lives. It shouldn’t be there. It isn’t the truest thing about us. It isn’t our new self. But it’s there. This is just every Christian’s conflict. There’s a sense in which though free in the new nature, we’re still bound by the humanness that we dwell in.

And may I again say, I really don’t think an unregenerate person can make a statement like this because I don’t think they know the law is spiritual, for one thing, and I don’t think they know they’re fleshly, for another. And I also don’t think they’re sold under sin. They live under the illusion that everything is okay. That’s exactly what it says in verse 11, that sin has a way of doing – what? - deceiving.

But when the law is seen as really spiritual, then a man sees himself as so far from fulfilling God’s holy law and sees himself as unspiritual. In fact, that’s the way the verse could really read: The law is spiritual but I am unspiritual, experiencing a bondage to sin.

The fine exegetical commentator Cranfield wrote, “The more seriously a Christian strives to live from grace and to submit to the discipline of the gospel, the more sensitive he becomes to the fact that even his very best acts and activities are disfigured by the egotism which is still powerful within him, and no less evil because it is often more subtly disguised than formerly.”

Now let me tell you something that will shock you. He’s right. You are not less evil now than you used to be in your unredeemed mortality and humanness. You’re evil. And there aren’t a whole lot of degrees to it. It only takes one sin to be evil. There is in you a new nature that is holy, but that sinful presence of the flesh is still there.

The blessed commentator of old, Thomas Scott, wrote, “When the believer compares his actual attainments with the spirituality of the law, and with his own desire and aim to obey it, he sees that he is yet to a great degree carnal and under the power of evil propensities from which, like a man sold for a slave, he cannot wholly emancipate himself, he is carnal in exact proportion to the degree in which he falls short of perfect conformity to the law of God.” It’s a great statement. “He is carnal - ” in exact degree or “ - in exact proportion to the degree in which he falls short of perfect conformity to the

law of God."

And don't you see, beloved, that this really is what verse 13 was saying? Sin is so sinful, sin is so wretched, it is so vile that even when a person has been redeemed, sin hangs on with its clinging wretchedness. That's his condition, and yours and mine as Christians.

The proof of it, verse 15. Here's the proof. "For that which I do, I know not; for what I would, that do I not, but what I hate, that do I." The self-righteous, moral man may deceive himself but a true Christian led by the Spirit won't. He sees the proof in him of indwelling sin. Notice the verse carefully. "That which I do, I know not." And then later on he says, "What I hate, I do."

The word "know" speaks of an intimacy of love. It was said of Joseph that he had not known Mary. And I think its use here as a contrast to the word "hate" gives us the liberty of understanding it that way. And what he is saying is that which I do, I do not love. And that which I hate, I do. Which is another way of saying the same thing.

Now that is a real psychological personal inner turmoil of conflict of the most profound kind. He says, "My will is frustrated." It isn't so much that when he wants to do one good thing, he can't do it. It is that when he sees the law of God and he wants to do it all, he can't. You understand? It is not a debilitating thing that says, "Well, here I am as a Christian, and I'd like to say a nice thing about this deal, or I'd like to do something good, I'd like to do something honorable and holy, but I don't know how to do it." That isn't the idea, that he's talking about one specific that he can't do. What he's saying is there is a whole law of God that I want to obey and I am utterly frustrated in trying to do it.

And you know that frustration. No sooner have you done something right, that you're patted on the back for doing it, and immediately you just did something wrong, you got proud. And you frustrate yourself and you say just what he said, "O wretched man, when do I get rid of this conflict?"

His will is frustrated. It isn't that evil wins all the time. It's just that he has such a high standard because the law is so holy, so just, so good, so spiritual, that when he sees the high standard of the law, he wants to win all the time on God's side and any victory for evil looks to him like horrendous defeat. And that's why I say, and so often do I say it, that the road to spirituality is paved with a sense of your own wretchedness, always. Not your own self glory. Here is a truly spiritual man. This is a broken contrite heart. This is a man crying out, "O God, I can't be all you want me to be. I can't fulfill all Your holy and just and good law."

And, you know, there are a lot of Christians who aren't at this point, and it isn't cause they're so holy, it's because they're so thin in their comprehension of God's holy law. Well, he's given us the condition, and he's given us the proof, and now he gives us the source. And we'll stop with this one.

Verse 16. “If then I do that which I would not, I consent to the law that it is good,” I mean, it isn’t the law’s fault, because I want to do the law. Well, you say, “What’s making you want to do the law?” I’ll tell you what’s making me want to do the law. That new creation, that divine nature in me, that incorruptible eternal seed in me, that part of me that John spoke about when he said, “if you’re really born again, you won’t sin.” That new part of me, it really longs to do the law, it really wants to do the law, and so I affirm that the law is good because the good part of me wants to do it. You see? The law is good.

Now then, verse 17. If it isn’t the law that’s bad, if the law’s not my problem, “now then, it is no more I that do it, but - ” what? “ - sin that dwelleth in me.” Now listen very carefully. You’ll miss the whole thing if you miss this. The Christian has in his heart the sense of the moral excellence of God’s law. The more mature that Christian is, the more profoundly committed to the direction of the Spirit of God in his life, the deeper his love for the Lord Jesus Christ, the deeper his sense of God’s holiness, the greater the longing to fulfill the law. And since it is the best part of him that wants to fulfill God’s law, then God’s will - God’s law - must be the best. And so it isn’t God’s law that’s a problem. The problem is sin that dwells in me. It’s our humanness again.

But here in verse 17 is the key statement to interpret the whole passage. In verse 14, he just spoke in generalities. And he sort of gave us a perspective of his unredeemed humanness as sort of dominating himself, and you and I know that experience. We get the feeling sometimes that sin just dominates. We just can’t be all we want to be for God. Haven’t you ever felt that way? We just can’t be as powerful. We just can’t be as pure. We just can’t be as holy as we know His law wants us to be. And so we can say in verse 14, I’m fleshy and I see myself captured by sin.

And that’s a non-technical statement. That’s just a general statement. And he says “I am fleshy,” and he’s not dividing himself into two. He’s not saying, “Well, it isn’t me. It’s sin at that point.” He’s just saying it’s - I’m responsible.

I think verse 14 is very important because it says to the Christian that if you sin, who’s responsible? It’s you. And it protects us from sort of philosophical dualism, and this is being taught in many circles today, that when you sin it’s just your old nature so let it sin. You can’t correct an old nature anyway, let it do its thing. And that God doesn’t hold you responsible, it’s just your old nature. He says I - I - and he accepts responsibility, and so must you. It’s me. He’s not two people. He’s speaking in non-technical terms. When I see God’s pure and holy law, I see my sinfulness. And I say, “O how sinful I am, and the more I understand God’s law, the more I see how I am captive to sin.”

But I don’t want you to get confused, he says in verse 17. And let me just clarify this. It isn’t any more really I that do it, but what? Isn’t that important? You see, now he’s giving you a technical distinction. Now - watch this - it is no more I. You want to know something? There are no “no mores” in an

unbeliever's life. Whatever he was, he still is. There are no mores "no mores" in an unregenerate person's life. He didn't have any "no mores." He doesn't have any "nows," either. He can't say, "Now I'm different. No more am I that way." There aren't any "nows" and there aren't any "no mores." When he says de *ouketi*, a negative adverb of time, from this point on something changed. Now, since Christ has come into my life and I've been redeemed, it is no more that deep inner self, in a technical sense. It's no more I that is doing this, but it is sin that hangs on.

Are you getting, beginning to understand the distinction he makes? You have to understand this in order to understand the character of regeneration. He splits semantic hairs in verse 17, not in 14. In 14 he just makes a general statement, in 17 he clarifies by saying, "now get it straight." It isn't really anymore I, it used to be I. When I could say "I was carnal and I was sold under sin," and that was really all there was to I. But now it isn't any more really the new I, it's just Galatians 2:20 all over again, folks. "For I - " that's the old I " - am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live, yet it's not I - " not the old I " - Christ lives in me: and the life I live I live...by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." You see, he's saying, "It's me but it's not me. It's a new me." And that's what he's saying in verse 17.

So after salvation, the part of man where sin lies no longer resides in his inmost self. It no longer resides in the ego. It's no longer there in the very substance of what that man is. That's recreated to be like Christ. And sin finds its residual dwelling in his flesh, in his humanness. And he says that in verse 18, "In my flesh dwells no good thing."

What is the source of Paul's problem? The condition, conflict. The proof, I don't do what I want to do, I do what I don't want to do. The source - end of verse 17 - sin that – what? - dwells in me, indwelling sin.

May I suggest to you that there's a big difference between surviving sin and reigning sin? Sin no longer reigns, but it does survive in us. I'll close with this. We're like an unskilled artist who has a picture to be painted, clear view. Maybe he's out and he sees the mountains, and trees, and rivers. And he's got his easel, got all of his little paints. And he's ready to paint this glorious landscape. The thing is, he's a real klutz and he can't paint stick figures, let alone landscapes. He has the scene to be painted in all its wondrous majesty. He has the paints to paint it. But he doesn't have the skill. He's debilitated by his physical incapacity. It isn't that he can't perceive it. It isn't that he doesn't have available tools. It's just that his clumsiness is in the way. The fault is not with the scene, is it? Nothing wrong with the scene. The fault isn't even with the paint. The fault is with the artist's inability. And that's really where the Christian finds his frustration.

I believe that's where we come to the point where we ask the master artist to put his hand on our hand, to hold our hand as we hold the brush, and paint the strokes that we independent of him could never paint. And that's why we have to realize that the victory we do experience comes only when we

yield ourselves to the one who can overcome the flesh.

In Galatians - I close with this verse - 5:17. “For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary one to the other: so that you cannot do the things that you would.” Sound familiar? Just like Romans 7.

You say, “Well, I know that battle. How do you win it?” Back up one verse. “*This* I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill - ” what? “ - the lust of the flesh.” I believe the Spirit can give us victory. But let me just warn you, the more victory you have, and the more you mature in Christ, and the more you see righteousness winning over sin, the more you will recognize the sinfulness of sin, and the more you will find yourself in Romans 7. It is a place for totally committed, whole-heartedly abandoned people, whose deepest most profound longing is to fulfill the whole law of God, and they are in great distress because they can’t do it. And they cry out, “O wretched man, when - ” verse 24 “ - do I get out of the ” what? “ - the body?” The terms are always consistent. “When do I unload this baggage and get to glory, and eternally fulfill the law of God?”

That’s the first lament. Two more to go. Let’s pray.

Our Father, we thank You tonight for this very, very insightful passage that opens up our hearts to us and helps us to see the struggle. We thank Thee, O God, that we’re new in Christ. We think of the words of the apostle Paul to the Corinthian church when he wrote, “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things have passed away, behold all things have become new.” And we know, Father, that in the new nature all things are new, that in that new self that we are in Christ, everything is new, and there is righteousness there.

But, Father, the flesh, the body of this death, our members, this mortal body with its residual fleshy character hangs on and causes a battle. Help us to know that it isn’t the fault of the law. The law is holy, just and good. It’s the fault of sin.

And, God, give us the heart’s desire to fulfill all Your good law, to see sin defeated. And we know that comes when we walk in the power of the Spirit, yielded to Him, tasting the sweetness of victory until the day when Jesus comes and frees us from the body of this death, and we become all that we should be in Thy glorious presence.

Keep our hearts open as we continue through this chapter that we might hear You speak. We thank You in Christ’s name. Amen.

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