

## Week 3 – Power Over Sin - Rom 7

In this familiar section of Romans, Paul continues his argument about the law and grace. After stating that sinners are made righteous, atoned, and redeemed as a gift of God's grace on the basis of faith (3:21-36) he asks, "do we, then, nullify the law by this faith?" The doctrine of salvation by faith requires that Paul shift the Law away from being the *basis* of righteousness without characterizing the law as something opposed to God's plans. The real question concerns the relationship of the Law to sin, with the real goal to conquer sin. If we follow Paul's intermediate arguments from 4:1-7:6 we find that he makes three important statements about law: (1) Abraham was considered righteous apart from law, (2) law defines sin, (3) law has authority until there is a death. Thus Paul says the *purpose* of the Law was to define sin but law functioned as a measure of righteousness and a slave-master. At this point Paul asks the question, "Is the law sin?" To answer this question Paul reaches into his bag of writing techniques and chooses a historical character that can depict the effects of law better than any other person, namely Adam. Adam is the only man who lived before any law and the only one who saw the dramatic can in relationship with God brought about by sin.

### ***Struggling With Sin (expanding on 7:5 "sinful passions aroused by law")***

[Question] 7 What shall we say, then? Is the law sin?

[Answer] Certainly not!

[Example] Indeed I (Adam, from 5:12f ) would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet." 8 But sin [serpent, Satan], seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment [singular commandment], produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead. 9 Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment [singular] came, sin sprang to life and I died. 10 I found that the very commandment [singular] that was intended to bring life actually brought death. 11 For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death.

[Conclusion] 12 So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.

[Question] 13 Did that which is good, then, become death to me?

[Answer] By no means!

[Explain] But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.

### ***Discussion***

- Clear section marker with 7:7-8. Another clear section division is signaled by the fact that in 7:4-13 all the verbs are past tense, vv. 14-25 are present tense verbs. So 7:1-8 is a unit.
- Early commentators recognized Paul's use of personification represented in the "I" of this section. Among them were Origen, Jerome, Chrysostom, Rufinus, Didymus, and others.
- Ovid – "Desire persuade me one way, reason another. I see the better and approve it, but I follow the worse."
- Epictetus – "What I wish, I do not do, and what I do not wish, I do." (2.26.4)
- Epictetus 2.26.1f – "Every error comprehends contradiction: for since he who errs does not wish to err, but to be right, it is plain that he does not do what he wishes..."

## Rom 7:14-25 – Life in Adam under law

[Expansion] 14 We know [identifies with audience...Jews and Gentiles] that the law is spiritual [good, holy, 7:12]; but I am unspiritual [fleshly], sold as a slave to sin. 15 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. 16 And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. 17 As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. 18 I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature [flesh]. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. 19 For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

[Conclusion] 21 So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. 22 For in my inner being I delight in God's law; 23 but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.

[Summary] 24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

### **Discussion**

- If the “I” in 7:7-13 is not Paul, then the “I” in 14-25 is not Paul either, because there is no signal of the change.
- The “I” in vv. 14-24 is an extension of the “I” (Adam) in vv. 7-13 extended to all those in Adam (ala 5:12-21)
- Change in verb tense from past-tense in 7:7-13 and present-tense in 7:14-25 indicates that in 7:14-25 Paul is talking about a current concern that is linked to the past situation described in 7:7-13.
- The “I” in this section cannot be a Christian because Paul has already clearly stated that the Christian is free from the slavery to sin (6:1-7:6).
- “I” is not Paul struggling with sin as a Jew .that would conflict with his testimony in Phil 3.6f, Gal 1.14 where Paul asserts his ability to make progress and sounds a confident tone about his ability to keep the law.

### **Dead to Sin**

- (6:6) “Our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – because anyone who has died has been freed from sin”
- (6:14) “for sin shall not be your master”
- (6:18) “you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness”
- (7:6) “but now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in old way of the written code.”