

Romans 7:13 - 25

A Commentary

I. General Introduction

Romans chapter seven has been the subject of unending debate since St. Augustine saw a different man portrayed in Romans 7:14-25 than the previous three centuries. For three hundred years, the christian expositors had seen this section of Scripture as depicting an unconverted man and his struggles with sin and the law - apart from the life of God. That is, this Romans seven man was not a christian. But with Augustine and his experience came the view that this Romans seven man (hereafter, "R7" man) was a picture of a christian and his/her struggles with indwelling/remaining sin.

Indeed, Romans seven and its "I do what I would not" (v15) was, for Augustine, the very height of christian experience and spirituality; seeing this was a man who knew the law of God and loved to obey, but found that on this side of heaven the obedience fell far short of that which was the loving obedience of all our heart, mind, soul, and strength (Mk 12:30). Augustine, the great bishop from hippo, saw this "R7" man as one who understood his own heart, as well as his spiritual strengths and weaknesses. To use a modern phrase, this "R7" man was in the truest sense "honest to God."

With the nineteenth century, the christian church came to a third position - a position we might call the "christian under law" position. For many of the expositors influenced by the Keswick/higher life thought, this new view became popular and is now quite common in 20th century evangelical exposition. This view is essentially that the man of Romans seven is a christian who was striving to live what is called the victorious life ("I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," Phil 4:13), and yet failing.

The explanation given to this struggle in Romans seven was not Augustine's view that, for the christian, this is the norm. For the "victorious christian" who is to live the "more than conquerors" life (Rom 8:37), this type of conflict displays the christian's lack of faith and/or fleshly striving to accomplish this goal by his/her own efforts. For this "defeated christian," the key to "victory" is the Spirit's enablement and, since the Holy Spirit is not in the experience of Romans 7:13-25, the goal is to get out of Romans seven and our human efforts (the "I" of v.v.14,15 etc.) and enter into the Romans eight life/experience.

What the previous two views have in common is that this is christian experience; the reasons, questions, and solutions of each view differing in what they believed the root problem was for Paul and is for us. Today, these two views dominate the evangelical understanding of this most important passage (Romans 7:13-25). It should be noted that the finest of expositors in church history have seen the Romans seven man as a christian man (in particular, see John Owen's "Indwelling sin," John Murray's "Romans," NICNT series, etc.).**

Nevertheless, although the authors of the "christian" position are both deeply pious and highly intellectual, there are clear reasons to adopt the earliest view of the R7 man, that of an unsaved man. Indeed, the arguments against this being christian experience are insurmountable if only from the division of Paul's line of thought in this and previous chapters in Romans.

**** There is a 4th view that has arisen in recent church history. This is the prospective that the man in Romans seven is a "carnal christian," dominated by sin and unrighteousness. This man is supposedly a christian, although one could not tell by his life. Enough said about this ancient heresy of antinomianism (see Rom 6:1!!). Now to continue.**

II. General Outline of the Book of Romans

The following is a simple outline of Romans:

I. Introduction - 1:1-15

II. Romans theme, The Gospel - the Righteousness of God revealed - 1:16,17

A. The Universal Need of Righteousness

1. Gentile need of Righteousness - 1:18-32

2. Jew's need of righteousness - 2:1-3:8

3. Summation of mankind's need of righteousness - 3:9-20

B. The Righteousness of God and the Gospel - 3:21-31

C. O.T. proof of righteousness through faith - 4:1-25

D. Fruit of gospel righteousness/justification - 5:1-21

V.a) Query #1 - Shall we continue in sin that grace might abound? - 6:1-14

V.b) Query #2 - Shall we continue in sin because we are not under law? - 6:15-23

VI. Need for the dominion of grace - 7:1-6

VI.a) Query #3 - Is the law sin? - 7:7-12

VI.b) Query #4 - Is the law the cause of death? - 7:13-25

VII. Summation of Gospel truth - 8:1-4

VIII Life in the Spirit - 8:5-39

IX. Israel and the gospel

IX.a) Query #5 - Israel's past - Did God fulfill his word (v6a)? - 9:1-33

a-1) answer, v.v. 6b-13

b-1) query#5-1, v.v. 14-18

c-1) query#5-2, v.v. 19-24

d-1) conclusion, v.v. 25-33

IX.b) Query #6 - Israel's present - The righteousness they seek and its results - 10:1-21

IX.c) Query #7 - Israel's future - 11:1-32

1) has God cast off Israel? - 11:1-10

2) have those who stumbled fallen irrevocably? - 11:11-32

- Final Doxology - 11:33-36 -

X. Practical application of the Gospel - 12:1-16:27

This is not a difficult outline, and thus presents an easy guide to understanding the book. Romans is an exposition of the righteousness of God in the gospel and its need (1:16,17; 1:18-3:31); the righteousness of God and its Old Testament proof (chp 4); the truths, both doctrinal and practical, flowing from God's righteousness in the gospel (5:1-21; 8:4b-39; chps 12-16); and the problems that arise from the gospel of grace (see in Romans 6:1-14;6:15-23; 7:7-12;7:13-25; 9:1-13; 9:14-18; 9:19-24 etc.; 10:1-3ff; 11:1-10;11:11-32). Note this last list of verses and their purpose, for this will impact our mastery of Romans seven. Also, note that Romans is a very systematic book. It moves from doctrine, to questions and answers clarifying the doctrine, to the application of doctrine.

III. Romans Seven: Its Context and its Themes

1. Paul's use of κυριεω directing his theme of Romans 7

In the case of the greek work κυριεω (English, "dominion"), Paul gives us insight into how Romans seven is connected to his previous theme(s). His desire is to deal with the dominion of sin - a dominion that ceases to exist with grace and union with Christ (6:14; 7:4). In his use of κυριεω (Rom 6:14; 7:1), Paul establishes a clear link between Romans 6 and Romans 7. His theme is freedom from the tyranny of sin by union with Jesus Christ our Lord. There are other truths that arise, but our starting point is here.

The resolution of this issue was imperative for the apostle. Paul could not have left off the "not under law but under grace" statement of Romans 6:14 without some expansion. Romans 6:14 must have seemed an anti-Torah/anti-Moses concept. Indeed, this was a common charge against christianity and Paul (Acts 6:14; 21:21), although untrue (Acts 28:23), and Paul would be anxious to deal with what would be to the Jewish mind an extraordinary statement.

Paul begins with an analogy/illustration of the Old Testament law of marriage to explain a person's relationship to law. Our "law" relationship is like marriage in that there is permanence - a permanence which is only severed by death (cf. "bound" vs. "free," v.v.2,3). Now since the law only brings wrath (Rom 4:15), and only produces death (Rom 7:5), Paul forces his Roman readers to the solution of Romans 7:4 - that of union with (i.e. bound to) Christ and not the law. Instead of the law having dominion unto death, Christ's grace provides a dominion unto life (cf. 6:14). We sustain a new and living relationship to Christ rather than the law, a relationship that is an essential element of life eternal.

2. The Law and Romans Seven

There is clear proof of Paul's supreme interest in writing Romans seven just by tracing the word "law," a word used 25 times in the first six chapters, but 16 times in Romans seven alone (and

Paul will use this word again but eight times in Romans 8:5-16:27). This is all the more significant in a book where the law/grace polemic reaches its greatest height of thought and discourse. Simply stated, there is little doubt as to the major subject and basic impetus for Romans seven. Paul's great concern in Roman seven is an exposition and clarification regarding the purpose and place of The Law.

3. Romans 7:5 - Paul, and his association of:

SIN → #1 ← LAW → #2 ← DEATH

"...the motions of sin, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. - Romans 7:5

Paul, in verse five, establishes an important relationship between sin, the law, and death. It is so controversial that Paul will entertain two questions in light of his linkage between;

1) sin ← → law, and

2) law ← → death, (Questions, 7:7 & 7:13).

He had just stated the need to have our life severed from the law and its sure end - death, and to be united to Christ and the salvation life that brings holiness. Now in Romans 7:5, Paul will reflect back to the days where we were "in the flesh" (i.e. without Christ) to buttress the needed union of sinner to Savior spoken of in Romans 7:4.

We must remember that those who knew and loved the law always saw the law as the key ingredient in any relationship to God. It was their glory, and they rested in it (Rom 2:17f). For Paul to not only advocate justification by faith, but to put law in the same sentence as sin and death would have astounded those who put their trust and joy in this law.

But as Paul explains here and elsewhere, the "letter" (law) could grant nothing to the sinner who had been described in Romans 3:9-18. Life is in the Prince of Life (Acts 5:31) and in the "newness of the Spirit" (Romans 7:6), not in the law as the Jews believed.

4. Romans 7:6 - A Hiatus

Again, akin to the use of “law,” a third word clearly dictates an important theme (or in this case, the lack thereof) in Romans seven. The word “Spirit” is almost an unknown in Romans until 7:6 (indeed, if 1:4 is not the Holy Spirit, He is not mentioned in Romans until 7:6). In turn, this means Romans eight is in reality an exposition of Paul’s phrase in Romans 7:6 “newness of the Spirit” (the word “Spirit” being used 18 times in the first 27 verses of chapter eight).

Thus, Romans 7:7-25 is nothing more than a pause in Paul’s thought - a hiatus - in the outworking of the gospel of grace, and in particular the Spirit’s work. Paul felt, because of his expositional linkage of sin/law/death in 7:5, he must leave off his elucidation of this “newness of the Spirit” life (v6) until chapter eight. In this way he is able to clear up the sure misconceptions that arise from his linking these three giants of Biblical revelation, Sin→Law→Death from 7:5.

5. Romans 7:7 - Is the law sin?

It must be clear that question of Romans 7:7 has as its source the Pauline statement of Romans 7:5. It cannot be but that Paul’s words (“the passions of sin that were through/by the law”) were the springboard for Paul’s query of Romans 7:7.

Romans 7:7-12 is an unfolding of Paul’s personal life as unconverted under the law, written from the standpoint/understanding of a christian man (this is also true of 7:14-25). Remember, Paul is using the personal experience of his past to show the law is not sinful, but sin uses the law to deceive and destroy. This autobiographical approach of Paul is clear from the use of “I,” starting in v seven. Even in Paul’s personal introduction (Rom 1:1-15), “I” is only used 12 times to 32 times in Romans 7:7-25, starting with 7:7 (as an additional note, the greek emphatic word for “I,” εγω, is used in Romans 16 times, eight of which are in Romans 7:7-25).

Paul's reflections in Romans 7:7-12 are personal experiences from the heart of a man who followed the letter of the law ("touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless," Phil 3:5,6). Then, as one who had been faced with the inner workings of the law (i.e. the 10th commandment, covetousness, 7:7-8), he gives his innermost struggles as one who was blameless externally, but saw the failings of his own life as touching internal holiness. Sin used its inherent allurements to first deceive ("the commandment that was unto life" - v10), and then destroy ("I found to be unto death" - v10). All of this is in the context of Paul, the law, and obeying that law for righteousness unto life eternal.

But Paul's true intent is still to answer the question of verse seven, "Is the law sin?" We are apt to forget this in the midst of Paul's interesting autobiographical statements. Paul wants to vindicate the law from the charge that, because there is a relationship between law and sin, the law might somehow be tainted by sin. Now that Paul's concern is vindicating the law and not primarily autobiographical, is born out by his concluding words in v12; "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good."

Now from the preceding truths of our study up to this point, one important truth seems crystal clear; the division of the first two sections of Romans 7 are 7:1-6 and 7:7-12. Now let us look at the main body of Romans seven - Romans 7:13-25.

13 Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.

Tense, Present vs. Past

Again, we must remind ourselves of the issue of dividing Romans seven properly. We will not - indeed cannot - get a look at the R7 man unless this is settled in our minds. Historically, it has been common to divide Romans seven into three parts of; 7:1-6, 7:7-13, and 7:14-25 (this is true in commentaries and even Bibles!). The reason for this is not far to see. The greek verbs/participles/infinitives of 7:7-13 are in the past tense (example, "was," v8,9,10,13), whereas in 7:14-25 verbal words are almost exclusively in the present tense (example, "is," v14,16,17,18,20,21, etc.).

For many Bible scholars and students, the overwhelming abundance of the greek present tense in this latter portion of Paul's writing (Rom 7:14-25) speaks forcibly to the truth that Paul is reflecting upon his own present, personal, christian struggles with sin.

Note: There are no other places in Paul's writings that even approach Romans seven and its abundant use of the present tense in such a brief segment. In Paul exposition (v.v. 15-24a) of "carnal, sold under sin" (v14), he never departs from the use of the present tense. This is an amazing and vivid personal narrative!

Further, reflections such as, "I am carnal" (v14), and "O wretched man that I am" (v24) would, at first glance, seem to be positive proof that this is the experience of Paul as he was when he wrote these words (that is, as a christian). Nevertheless, there are three insurmountable reasons (among others we shall look into) why the above division (and subsequent exposition) cannot be

Paul's intent in Romans 7:7-25.

First, Paul's previous subject - the question of the law being sinful - was asked and answered in 7:7-12. Most assuredly v12 is the answer to which verse seven is the question. Second, a new query is put to the readers in v13, "Is that which is good made death unto me?" This Paul would have never been done if the question of the law's sinfulness had not been resolved. Third, that Paul states plainly "Is that which is good," v13, means he has settled the issue of the goodness of the law and is seeking to deal with a further subject. The subject he speaks of presently in v13 is not whether the law is sinful/good, but whether the law is the cause of death.

NOTE: If; 1) the division of 7:7-12 is accurate, and 2) v.v.14-25 also go together but deal with a different subject than 7-12 (which none seem to doubt), then we must conclude Paul intended to ask and answer the question of v13, all in the span of one verse, and then move on to a third subject in v14. Even a cursory look at Paul's style of arguing Biblical doctrine and the implications of that doctrine in Romans (see questions, Rom 6:1ff; 6:15ff; 9:14ff; 9:19ff; 11:1ff; 11:11ff) would disallow any notion of a one verse exposition/explanation on anything!

Does the Law cause our Death?

As was true of the first question in verse seven, the question of v13 finds its roots in verse five and the relationship Paul established between: 1) sin and the law, and 2) the law and death. In other words, in the link between #1 sin → law, and #2 law → death in 7:5, the issue is now #2, and this is taken up in v13. This division is germane to understanding the R7 man. Without this proper separation, we might well put v13 with 7:7-12 in error and thus confuse those things which Paul clearly/stylistically writes as different. Now to the apostle's question and answer.

Paul's response to the possibility that the holy law might cause death is refuted swiftly - μη γενοιτο! (English, May it never be!, NKJV). Ten times in Romans, Paul will use this phrase - his

strongest denial of a proposition (interestingly, the New Testament only has 15 total uses of μη γενοιτο!). What is most important in Romans 7:13 is Paul's style of following his μη γενοιτο! - his strong denial - with a summary statement as to why such a contemplation is unthinkable. Paul will then finish by following his "short" answer (v13) with a detailed expansion (14-25), such that the readers might be crystal clear as to why such a strong denial was warranted.

We see the same type of short/long Pauline response in Romans 6:2-3. Paul asks if God's grace will allow us to keep on sinning. His response is "May it never be," (μη γενοιτο), followed by "how shall we, that (lit) have died to sin, live any longer therein?" The rest of the section (6:3-14) is an expansion upon this blunt and succinct answer. Romans 11:11 follows the same pattern. The query "Have they stumbled that they should fall?" also has its "May it never be!," followed by the summary answer "but through their fall salvation has come to the gentiles, to provoke them to jealousy." Then, from 11:12-32, Paul will expand and illustrate the truth he had written in summary form in v11.

Summary

Now to the summary itself in the latter part of v13. The culprit of man's sad story of death is mentioned three times - SIN. The power of sin works death, using even the holy law in its fatal work. Paul is telling us that the exceeding sinfulness of sin is seen by what it uses (the law), what it causes (death), and thus sin, not the law, is the real criminal in the homicide of man. Paul declares the law indeed has a profitable place displaying the "sinfulness of sin."

But in Paul's exposition and summary of v13, sin marches on, using the law in the same way the devil did with Christ in the wilderness, deceiving and perverting that which is holy (note the devil's use of Scripture to tempt Christ in Matthew 4:6). This is what Paul will expound on for the next twelve verses (14-25). He will endeavor to accomplish two goals; the vindication of the law from being the cause of death, and the prosecution of sin as the true cause of death.

This is Paul's objective. He began in v13 by dealing with a possible misinterpretation of verse five and the phrase, "the law...brought (bring) forth fruit unto death," and ended with a clear articulation of the real cause of death - SIN.

14. For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.

Romans 7:14 and the use of “for”

Critical to a proper and accurate beginning in our understanding of v14 (and therefore 14-25!) is to see that Romans 7:14 is closely linked to v13 by the word “for.” Although it is not the interest of this writer in this present work to refer to other great works on Romans or Romans 7, one comment might be enlightening at this point.

A famous 500+ page work on Romans, commenting on this section, makes the following observation on Paul’s use of “for” in v14; “Here, as frequently, the word belongs not merely to a part of v13 but to the verse taken as a whole.” Later, “by some [Bibles] i.e., the NIV, the word [“for”] isn’t even translated.” This should cause us to look closer at v14’s first word “for,” because it sounds as if the above writer either finds “for” unnecessary or, more probably, superfluous to Paul’s argument. Yet nothing could be further from the truth.

It seems plain to see that all who divide Romans according to the tenses of this section (7:7-25) must outline as follows: 7:7-13 (past tense), and 7:14-25 (present tense). Yet, the connective word “for” establishes a tight link between v13 and v14 which negates such a division as 7:7-13 and 7:14-25. It is further evident that the word “for” in v14 is purposely there to expand and amplify upon the truth(s) of v13; in particular how the law, which is so good, is used by sin to bring forth death.

Indeed, the abundance of Paul’s use of “for” in Romans 7:13-25 assures us Paul’s use of this connective word at the beginning of v14 is a word the apostle will utilize well throughout this book to more readily clarify his thinking and his comments. Note: “I am carnal, sold under sin (v14), for...(v15), “it is no longer I, but sin that dwells in me (v17), for... (v18), “I find a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good (v21), for...(v22). Indeed, Paul’s connectives are everywhere in Rom 7:14-25 to help expand

and explain his comments (7:14; 7:15{twice}, 7:18{twice}, 7:19, 7:22).

In summary, Paul's language demands that any understanding of Romans 7 will tie v.v. 13 and 14 together! This is precisely what those who outline according to tenses will not (cannot?) do. Conclusion: in Romans seven; with its themes, outline, and logic, 7:13 and 7:14 are verses that belong together. To divide 7:7-13 from 14-25 because of the tense of verbs is not the proper method by which to obtain the Pauline line of thought in this segment of Romans.

A summary comment on this question of tenses. The reason for 20 of 23 present tense verbs, participles, and infinitives in 7:14-25 is not to call attention to Paul's present state of experience (this would surely be linguistic overkill in the use of the present tense!). Rather, Paul is drawing our attention to the persistent and incessant nature of both his struggle and failure (make no mistake, Paul says the results of the Romans 7:14ff conflict invariably ends in defeat, cf. 7:23).**

Note: As any first year greek student will testify: 1) verb tenses emphasize kind of action rather than time of action (the present tense is used for continuous action), and 2) the present tense is often used to make a narrative passage of a past experience or event more vivid (in the present). This is indeed what Paul attains in Romans 7:14-25. The display of perpetual defeat in performing the law, and a personal, expressive account of continuous failure. The outcome of that failure culminates in Paul's woeful declaration, "O wretched man that I am! (7:24)"

**** A.T. Robertson is possibly the foremost Greek scholar in the 20th century church (if not all church history). In his work on Romans (Robertson's Word Pictures) , "sold under sin" (for him) tilted the argument of the spiritual identity of the R7 man towards an unregenerate man. What is important is not the conclusion as such, but the fact that this great greek sage does not see the continuous use of the present tense as reflective of Paul's present experience!**

Paul's use of "I/εγω"

As we saw in previous studies, Romans seven is notorious for its autobiographical language. Just the words "I," "me," and "my" are used an amazing number of times in 7:7-25. Fifteen times the greek emphatic forms of "I," "me," and "my" are used, and in English, these pronouns are found an astounding 48 times in just 19 verses! There is no such linguistic equivalent anywhere in Scripture. Paul even makes this personal/autobiographical issue his starting point when in v14 he states, "the law is spiritual, but I..."

Now just as the personal pronouns "I," "me," and "my" are conspicuous by their presence, there is a word that is noticeable by its absence - the word "Spirit." This portion of the Word does not have "indwelling Spirit," but "indwelling sin." If the christian life is in view, such a discussion would not take place without reference to the Spirit. He who works out in our lives that life which He first placed in our soul would be an fundamental aspect of the Spiritual strife such as we see in Romans seven (cf. Spiritual life/warfare and "the sword of the Spirit," "supplication in the Spirit," Eph 6:17,18). This prevalence of the "I" and absence of "Spirit" set a clear tone for the nature of the conflict which unfolds in Romans 7:14-25.

Note: This may give us some help as to why Galatians 5:17, although sounding similar to Romans 7:14ff, is quite different, seeing that the Galatians 5 passage refers to the Spirit warring against the flesh, not "I" and the "law." More importantly, the tone of Gal 5:16-18 has a decidedly positive outlook, whereas Rom 7:14-25 unquestionably does not!

Let us be clear to this point. In v14, Paul is beginning his detailed elucidation of 7:13 by calling to mind a contrast between the law which has one essential quality, "spiritual," and "I/εγω," the human nature/essence which he says is "carnal." The fruit of this will be a conflict that invariably and perpetually results in defeat (cf. present tense, v15).

The obvious reason is that the "spiritual" law can only be obeyed and fulfilled by one who is "spiritual;" that is, one indwelt

by the Spirit (see Rom 8:9 as a proof that the term “spiritual” is just another way of describing a christian. This is because “you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God dwells in you,” and “now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His [e.g Christ’s]! [NKJV]). This “spiritual” quality/identity is precisely what is missing in the R7 man (7:14-25). It is the I/carnal vs. the law/spiritual.

I am “Carnal,”

Carnal (Greek, σαρκικός) could be interpreted in numerous ways. It is used ten times in the New Testament. In Romans 15:27 and 1 Cor 9:11, this word for earthly things in contrast to heavenly things in ministry. 1 Corinthians 3:1-4 uses “carnal” (3 times in four verses) as an equivalent to unsaved, or, as 3:4 puts it; “...are you not carnal, and walk as men (that is, walk as unregenerate/unsaved men)?” Twice the word seems to be equal to “worldly” (1 Cor 1:12; 2 Cor 10:4). Once it as an antonym of “spiritual” (Heb 7:16), and once equal to the sinful issuance of our members (1 Pet 2:11).

These are the different aspects of σαρκικός (a kindred word, “σαρκινος,” is used in 2 Cor 3:3). At this point though Paul shows us the way via his concluding remarks in Romans chapter 8:1-4. He uses a root word related to σαρκικός → σαρκος /σαρξ in 8:3. Consequently, the emphasis of “carnal” (σαρκικός) is on the frailty and infirmity of the flesh. Paul wants us to understand that among many possible ideas, the use of “carnal”/σαρκικός here means a carnality that can be described best as weak (Rom 8:3), or “sold under sin” (7:14).**

**** There are differences in texts in the use of σαρκινος / σαρκικός.**

I am ...”sold under sin”

The carnality if “I” is further explained by the phrase “sold under sin.” Now there are many important aspects to this word

translated “sold under sin,”(greek, πεπραμενος).

First, πεπραμενος is in the greek perfect tense. This is significant for many reasons: the perfect tense carries the idea of an action, once done, has perfective and/or permanent results up to and including the time of the recording of the action - and beyond. Classic examples of perfect tense verbs are “it is finished” (Jn 19:30), and “it is written” (Matt 4:10).**

Now Romans 7:14-25 contains 23 action words (verbs/infinitives/participles), of which 20 are in the present tense. The perfect tense of “sold under sin” stands in evident contrast to the whole of Paul’s “present tense” discourse on the war with sin.

Further, if a New Testament writer wants to get our attention, he surprises us in some way. He does this by the words used, the position of words in the sentence, or, as in this case, the mood or tense of a word. It is the last change that is used by Paul here. As he begins his narration, he stops us linguistically by, “I am carnal, and I stand in the state of being a slave - sold under sin” (perfect tense).

Second, “sold under sin” is just one of many similar bondage-type words in Romans seven used to identify this R7 man. In 7:6, Paul stated that under the law he was “held;” in 7:14 he is “sold under sin;” in 7:23 Paul uses words like “warring” and “captivity;” and in 7:24 it is written “who shall deliver.” All such language bespeaks of an existence of slavery, servitude, and bondage (comp “servant of sin”/“free from sin,” Rom 6:17,18).

Third, the verb translated “sold under sin” is in the passive voice. Just as action words of the greek language have tense to relate to the reader what type of action is occurring, verbs and other action words have mood to relate to the reader the involvement of the subject of the sentence in the action (in v14, the subject is “I”).

Now greek has active, middle, and passive voices. The active voice has the subject of the sentence doing the action, the middle voice has the subject of the sentence both doing and being affected by the action, and the passive voice simply implies that the subject is being acted upon. In the greek word translated “sold under sin,”

the verb is in the passive voice. This places the emphasis on the passive nature of the subject used to describe this man's carnality. He is being acted upon, that is, governed by another - SIN (Rom 7:5,17,20)*.**

****In Jn 19:30, the event of the cross is an event that happened at a point in time/history, but its blessed power to heal is still efficacious to this day. In the same way, the Word of God, having been declared in time, stands true forever - as true as when it was first declared (a good translation is "it stands written"). The essence of a verbal word in the perfect tense bespeaks an action which is true, and this truth remains constant.**

*****Those giants of old who saw this man as a christian, saw the passive mood of "sold under sin" as important. This R7 man did not (they say) actively give himself to sin, but was and is more passive in sinning. Yet this misses the point entirely. The fact that this man is passive only strengthens the issue of bondage, for slaves are not their own masters but are actively dominated by another - in our case, the master is sin, and the passive subject is "I."**

Conclusion - 7:14

There can be little doubt that Paul has a concern regarding the law and the charge that it is the possible cause of our spiritual death. He is quick to respond to this charge, and succinctly states that sin, not the law, is the perpetrator of death.

But his desire is to make us see the how and why of his answer to the query of v13, and thus he begins in v14 to explain how and why sin can bring to fruition the awful reality of taking God's holy law, and changing that which is good into an instrument of our destruction.

The Law is of the highest order, holy and spiritual. But I am carnal; that is to say that the εγω - I myself (v25). I, robed in flesh, am by nature, disposition and works, most accurately described by the phrase sold under sin. Paul will summarize his thought here beautifully (and verify the accuracy of our understanding) when, in

Romans 8:3, he will state; “what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh.” That is, what the spiritual law could not accomplish because the law comes through I, who am carnal, God accomplished by His Holy Son who nullified the dominion and power of sin.

15 For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.

Note: As an encouragement and an exhortation to study, it is curious to note that the three words translated “do” in v15 (KJV) are all different greek words (κατεργαζμαι, πρασσω, and ποιω); while in Romans 7:7,8, the same root greek word is translated into three different English words; “lust,” “covet,” and “concupiscence” (KJV)!

“for”

If any word gives us direction so as to understand and offers ease of interpretation, it is the connective “for” at the beginning of v14, and now v15. When Paul says that he does not allow (greek/γινωσκω, English/understand) that which he does, and the actions which he would do he does not do (and even hates what he does), he is saying that he is a slave. This is a testimony of a man who’s inclination - who’s will - is in chains. Verse 15 is simply a declaration - a portrayal; indeed, a personal narrative of being “sold under sin.” Simply stated, v15 is the practical, living expression of v14 and what it is to be “sold under sin” (just as “sold under sin” is the elucidation of what it is to be “carnal”). This is what “for” is there for!

Κατεργαζομαι / “do”

An introductory point of exposition should be made at the outset. The parallel between this verse and v19 is plain - almost a duplication. But where as we might mark v15 with clauses a, b, and c, v19 has but two clauses, which correspond to v15’s b and c. This means that v15a is an overall summarization of the conflict expressed in 15b/19a, and 15c/19b. Paul’s statement of 15a; “what I do I allow (know) not,” is amplified in 15b and 15c, as well as echoed in it parallel, 19a and 19b. A quick view of these text will confirm that this is precisely Paul’s intent. The only difference in v15 and v19 is the summary. Paul wanted to express his perplexity

(15a), and then describe the experience which formed the bases of that perplexity(15b-c, cf v19). Now to κατεργαζομαι/”do”.

It is in our verse here that we encounter another key word in Romans seven. We have seen Paul’s interest in “law,” in “I” or “εγω,” and we are confronted with another of Paul’s crucial words. It is κατεργαζομαι, translated “do” at the beginning of v15 (“that which I do”). In the New Testament this word is used 20 times, six of which are in Romans 7:7-25 (v.v. 8,13,15,17,18,20). Κατεργαζομαι is variously translated “wrought,” “working,” “do,” and “perform” in chapter seven. Paul even uses the root word of κατεργαζομαι in our key verse (v5), translated “working death in me.”

Now what is crucial regarding this word is two-fold: First, we are again connected back from v15 to v5 with the words ενεργεω (“working,” v5), and κατεργαζομαι (“do,” v15). Second, the word “do” (κατεργαζομαι) communicates an effectual working in a given activity as opposed to the other words which are translated “do” (the root “εργ” means “work,” and with the added prepositional prefix “κατα,” the word means “work that is brought to a conclusion” or “effectual”). In other words, “that which I do I allow (know) not” is work, with the preposition κατα added to emphasize the finished or accomplished nature of the work. Thus, with “do,” Paul in v15a means that this “doing” is powerfully effecting his life in ways the apostle did not understand - ways which are given in v15b-c.

This is more than just do-ing. This is taking action that is effectual in achieving an intended goal. Yet, it is a goal Paul neither willed nor understood. Paul saw what really occurred in his life (κατεργαζομαι), and could not reconcile this with what he knew or willed, which was based on the law of God which he knew and loved as a Jew.

“I would,” vs. “I do”

We have seen vocabulary relating to bondage, such terminology akin to “sold under sin” (v14) and “captivity” (v23). Such ideas related to the inability of the sinner in v.v. 14-25 arise via some of his contrasting expressions. Paul unfolds this by

discussing the desire/will to do righteousness (cf. “to will is present,” v18), then contrasts this with the R7 man’s actions, which run contrary to willing (cf. “how to perform,” v18).

This disparity extends throughout Paul’s reflections in Romans 14-25. Paul will state that: “we know” (v14), “what I would” (v15), “to will is present” (v18), “when I would do good” (v21), “so then with the mind” (v25). In juxtaposition to all the “I would’s” and “I will’s,” Paul “[serves] the law of sin” (v25), and “how to perform [the law]... I find not” (v18).

This is the message of v15; knowing what is righteous while doing that which is unrighteous, and this is the bondage of sin Paul expresses in various forms. Paul will insure our grasp of this truth via repetition (v15, cf. v16a, v19, 20a). He will speak of [mental] delight in God’s law (v22), but will lose to the sin in his members and identify his predicament as “captivity” (v23) - or being “sold under sin” (v.14).

16 If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that [it is] good.

Paul will draw an inevitable deduction (v16) and a certain conclusion (v17) to v.v. 13-15. He will do this with “εἰ δε”/“if then.” Paul’s “εἰ δε” formula is used commonly in Romans to introduce an inference from previous truth (note the “and if’s” of Rom 8:9,10,11).

When Paul writes “if I do that which I would not,” he is declaring in condensed form his experience of v15. If we might paraphrase, Paul says basically in v16, “if v15 is my experience, then I consent with the law that it is good.” It is essential that we grasp this as Paul’s thrust. The first part of v16 Paul is stating that if the experience of v15 is my (or anybody’s) experience, then there is a clear deduction that can be made (i.e. “consenting to the goodness of the law,” 16b).

Such deductions are prevalent in Romans, a book of systematic thought. In Romans 8:25, Paul asserts “if we hope for that which we do not see, then we wait with patience.” Similarly, in Romans 11:6 “if it is works, [then] it is no longer of faith.” Paul sees the second part of his assertions as inescapably linked to the reality of first part in this type of sentence structure. This is the core of Paul’s reasoning in v16.

Now Paul has said that if his experience is that of slavery (v15), then 16b is a necessary truth. What this cannot mean is surprisingly what many commentaries say that it does mean! A prevailing exposition is that Paul wants to establish his genuine love for God’s law such as we have in Psalm 119. David declared “I delight myself in thy statutes” (Ps 119:16), and “Thy testimonies are my delight,” (Ps 119:24). This, commentators say, is Paul’s intent in v16 with his “the law is good.” He is stating in v16 what he will repeat in v22 (“I delight in the law of God after the inward man”).

Although this exegesis might sound tempting, it is radically foreign from Paul’s line of thought. An interpretation such as the above is certainly not the inevitable outcome of the v15! Further, how it correlates to v13 and Paul’s question of the law and death is enigmatic. Paul could not be interested in this R7 man’s love for the

law per se. There must be some connection to his argument heretofore. Indeed, the “for” of v14, the “for” of v15, and the “if then” of v16 makes this certain.

The Apostle’s interest then is v13 and the law being the possible cause of death. This is contextually the import of Paul’s thinking. While Paul summarized all of his answer in v13 - with his detail in v14 through v25 - here in v16 is the acquittal of the law. Later, he will enumerate the guilty party - SIN. But at this point, he is clearing the law from the charge of causing death (v13).

This is the meaning of “consent.” Paul is saying “as the law testifies of its essential spirituality, I concur with its witness - and therefore goodness - in juxtaposition to the charge of v13.” Paul’s train of thought is the following (subsequent to his summary answer in v13): 1) Is the law the cause of death (v13)? 2) No, the law is spiritual but I am carnal, that is, sold under sin (v14); that is, I cannot do that which is right (v15). 3) Now if that be true, then the law cannot be indicted for the charge in v13, because it is good (v16).

This is an understanding which is both simple and contextual.

Summary

Thus, Romans 7:13-16 ends part 1 of subdivision III, in Paul’s argument on the law and death. In Romans seven, Paul’s subdivision (I) was Romans 7:1-6. This is the conclusion of Paul’s answer to the startling words of 6:14, “sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.” Paul wants to give us a clear grasp of the necessity of his declaration in 6:14, “sin shall not have dominion because we are not under law but under grace.” Thus, the connection of “dominion” in 6:14 and 7:1, and Paul’s emphatic “dead to the law” of 7:4.

Romans 7:7-12 finds subdivision (II) of Paul’s dealing with the question of the law, and in particular its relation to sin - a possible accusation in light of sin’s connection with the law in 7:5. He briefly deals with how the law shows us our sin and concludes the law “is

holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.”

Romans 7:13-16 begins subdivision (III) of Romans seven. Paul wants to deal with law and its relationship to death. Is it the cause, or is there something missing? Paul sees a great deal missing. The law is spiritual, high and holy, but Paul, the “I,” is sold under sin such that he is a slave in life. This means that the cause of death cannot be laid at the feet of the law.

It is time to finish our understanding of what causes death, if not the law. This conclusion is the subject of the remainder of Roman seven (v.v. 17-25).

17 Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.

Introduction

With Paul's vindication of the law from the charge of precipitating death, he can proceed to analyze and expose the true culprit in the story of man's death - SIN. Again, these issues have been summarized for us in v13 (cf. "sin...working death"). We know that sin is the real evil and the cause of death, not the law. But Paul's words in v17 and subsequent verses will shed more light on our subject.

After first deducing that the law is free from the accusation of inducing death, the apostle wants to now conclude from his inferences in 13-16. As Paul has vindicated the law, he turns to the question of sin by saying: 1) Paul is no more doing it (his actions/works, v17a), and 2) the mover of his actions is the SIN that dwells in him.

"It is no more I that do it"

In Paul's first statement (17a), we are immediately tempted to conclude that Paul is somehow absolving himself of the sins - the sins he has confessed to committing in v15. The phrase "it is no longer I that do it" seems to permit this interpretation. But this theological conclusion is clearly against the "analogy of faith" (i.e. the overall teaching of Scripture, in this case the Biblical doctrine of sin). Careful examination will give us a ready and even beautiful Biblical answer.

Back in v15, we examined the greek work *κατεργαζομαι*, translated "that which I do." This is also our word in v17a, translated "do" again. Now let us pause to remind ourselves of the meaning of *κατεργαζομαι*, used six times in Romans 7:8-20. As we saw in Romans 7:15, the special distinction with *κατεργαζομαι* as opposed to the other "do's" is that the *κατεργαζομαι*/"do" is doing that is effectual. This word emphasizes the achievement of an action taken, or the execution of a given activity.

This is why “to perform” is such a proper translation of κατεργαζομαι in 7:18, and “wrought” in 7:8. Elsewhere in Romans, κατεργαζομαι is translated “work” (Rom 1:27; 2:9; 4:15; 5:3. 11 of 23 uses are in Romans). Paul, discussing the evil of the day in Ephesians 6:13, exhorts the saints; “having done all, to stand,” using our word κατεργαζομαι to communicate the vigorous nature of work required to stand.

Therefore, in v17, the apostle is writing that because of the truth(s) of what preceded (v15), I am no longer the controlling force behind my life, actions, and accomplishments. This is just another way of speaking of the bondage of the will and the slavery of sin.

We are not surprised at such language in light of Paul’s expressed experience in v15. Ephesians 2:1-3, in parallel fashion, gives us both an exposition of the themes we have been studying and the “why” of the language of v17; “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation (manner of life) in times past in the lust of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.” This is man’s essential problem - a problem of the lusts of his heart and mind dominating the will.

The Power and Workings of Sin

Consider in general how human choices are made, and in particular, such choices which are the fruit of the man in Romans seven. The mechanism of his actions is as follows: the nature of anything determines the desires and therefore the choice of any given action(s) [that is , the Biblical order is: MIND → HEART → WILL].

Note: A clear exposition of this truth is Romans 6:17; “But God be thanked, that [though] you were the servants of sin, you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine that was delivered unto

you.” The doctrine came to the Romans, they received it, and from the heart they obeyed (willed).

This is clearly a Biblical doctrine. If we may use an illustration reverently: Why is it that God cannot lie (Titus 1:2)? The obvious reason is that because God’s nature is holy, just, and good, and therefore it is impossible for Him to act contrary to His nature. Indeed, Hebrew 6:18 says just that. He cannot lie. It is impossible by nature.

Now the sum of these facts is this: the R7 man is a “carnal/sold under sin” man, and this is his nature (just as the law’s nature is “spiritual”). He is therefore impotent to do the law as v15 testifies. This means that the power of sin governs the will and has dominion over the sinner, which is Paul’s very point in Romans 7:17b. Again, let us reflect on Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. Paul’s words from Eph 2:3 speak of the “desires of the flesh, and of the mind.” The English “desires of the flesh” is really “will(s) (θελεματα) of the flesh.”

It is this power and will of sin (so to speak) that causes a sinner to do that which he knows to be wrong. The desires of the natural man’s life have been twisted toward unrighteous desires, and the question is... whom shall this natural man obey? According to Eph 2:3, it is the desire (will) of the flesh. Our desires were once pure from God (in the garden) for we were pure. Now our spirits, having been polluted by sin, pervert otherwise proper desires. In turn, these desires have opportunity through our members (bodies) to yield to unrighteousness and transgress God’s law (cf. Rom 1:24-28).

This is the contrast between saved and fallen man. The fallen man’s nature is flesh, and thus that which is born of flesh produces that which is fleshly, not spiritual (Jn 3:7). Jesus said to His enemies, “you believe not, because you are not of my sheep,” cf. Jn 10:26. Note, He did not say “you are not of my sheep because you do not believe.” First is nature, then the fruit of our nature - choice or will. This is why the new birth is needed to do spiritual deeds, such as believe, and this is what the Romans seven man is lacking. He cannot do righteousness, and this because his heart - his soul/nature - is governed by sin.

This power is described as “sin that dwelleth in me” (Rom 7:17,20). This indwelling sin is no more just benevolent residence, than the term “indwelling Spirit” means benevolent residence. Just as the Spirit’s work enables, empowers, strengthens, and directs, the same is true of Romans seven and “indwelling sin.” Sin rules, dictates, and is the key factor in the life of the sinner (this is why an unregenerate soul is inevitably called a “sinner,” while the christian is called a “saint”). The Spirit’s abiding makes us Christ’s (Rom 8:9), and indwelling sin makes an unregenerate man a captive to the sin which has taken up residence and commands his life. This is why the experience expressed in Romans 7:13-25 finds its climax in “O wretched man that I am (Rom 7:24).”

So Paul is saying to us that this R7 man does not understand, and cannot effectually work out that which he knows he should. This is because of his state as one with indwelling sin, and thus he is a “sold under sin” man. The dictator of his life and will is another such that, from one perspective, SIN prescribes the life and workings of the “I.”

Indwelling Sin - the term ΟΙΚΟΣ

The words of 17b, “sin that dwelleth in me,” are words which form the basis for explaining christian life as redeemed, yet struggling. John Owen, a great 17th century author produced a work on “Indwelling Sin,” the definitive work on sin and the christian struggle (the classic for three centuries). Most important, in most every work on the christian walk, the term “indwelling sin” has become synonymous with the remaining sin in the christian. Now Paul stated, “it is no longer I...but sin.” But what of the “sin that dwelleth in me??” Why does Paul add this phrase (used only here and in v20 in the entire New Testament)?

Paul’s word “dwelleth” is the greek ΟΙΚΟΥΣΑ, from ΕΝΟΙΚΕΩ – the basic root word being ΟΙΚΟΣ, which means “house.” Paul gives us a word, and by that word the image of a house, a dwelling, a residence. Further, “indwelling/ΟΙΚΟΥΣΑ,” is a present participle which emphasizes the perpetual nature of sin’s activity. This is fundamentally what the phrase “indwelling sin” conveys, the endless

ruling/dominating element of sin in the sinner.

Thus for Paul to discuss the οἶκος (house) of man and the sin which is a part of it when man is unsaved (such terminology as “indwelling/οἰκουσα sin”) communicates an image readily understandable. But our grasp of Paul’s intention must be that sin is not merely resident, but dominant.

The R7 man is a man that can understand what is good and proper with his mind. Yet he has a nature that is polluted by sin - indwelling/reigning sin - such that there is no aspect of his person that is unaffected by the sin and fall of Adam that is the nature which is his. As James so forcefully illustrated this truth, no fountain can yield both salt water and fresh water (James 3:12). Man by nature is a bad tree which bears bad fruit (Matt 7:17; Lk 6:43).

Now man’s nature determines his choices as well as his ability to carry out those choices. Man’s nature is identified as a nature that is indwelt by sin (Rom 7:17,20); that is, sin is the dominate principle of his nature and therefore his life, will, and abilities. Thus, although the law is spiritual, and is confessed as such by a Jew like Paul, his nature is carnal and his ability to do that which is spiritual does not exist. Paul will say in chapter eight of Romans, “So they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom 8:8). Sin is the master of the house - the οἶκος - and we do his bidding.

This is what v17 means by “...not I, but sin that dwelleth in me.”

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.

Although we have said this numerous times, Paul’s use of “for” allows clear interpreting when coming to passages such as v17. We may wonder about the phrase “no longer I but sin that dwelleth in me.” But with v18 and “for,” Paul will help us as to whether our view of v17 is true. Simply stated, v18 will amplify on v17 (and 18b will amplify 18a, cf. “for to will...”).

“in me... dwelleth no good thing”

Straightway, we meet up with a phrase with which we are apt to stumble over unless we have followed Paul’s train of thought hitherto. Taken out of context, we could come to the conclusion that Paul is reflecting on some aspect of flesh vs. Spirit, or possibly some deliberation on the “Spirit-filled life.” This is a tendency we must strive to avoid. It has been the history of 20th century thinking to do such with some of Paul’s more or less obscure statements.

But Paul is never in the habit of jumping in and out of themes without clear linguistic warnings. There are no such warnings here. Paul has finished with the law, and has turned his attention to sin and its workings in the heart of this “carnal” man. His “for” in v18 makes clear Paul’s intent is to amplify on “no longer I, but sin” from v17. Whatever Paul’s use of language in v18, it will be an enlargement upon sin and its fruits. And although there will be temptation to be creative with interpreting “in my flesh dwelleth no good thing,” we must refrain from doing so.

In v17, the apostle spoke of the strength of indwelling sin as opposed to the powers of “I.” He will further substantiate these truths by declaring that in his flesh dwells nothing good to assist a sinner in carrying out the righteousness of the law. This is clearly because he told us that the R7 man has “indwelling sin.” This has been his thrust all along. He is “carnal,” “sold under sin,” and dominated by the indwelling reign of sin (v17). Thus, he knows that there is nothing in him that gives effectual aid in this fight, nor is this R7 man portrayed as having anything potent enough to conquer the enemy - SIN.

When Paul speaks of “nothing good in his flesh,” he means in his flesh, there is nothing capable of winning this inward war (as an aside, “flesh” (v18) is σαρξ, just as “carnal” (v14) is σαρκ(ξ)ικος). Paul learned by experience in his unregenerate days (reflecting back through redeemed eyes) that understanding the good did not insure ability to do good. What was commanded, he could not fulfill.

“to perform...I find not”

Further amplification follows with Paul's "for," an elucidation which Paul has spoken of previous in 13-16, as well as 17 and 18a. Just as in the experiential passage (v15), to will the good (the law) is present with Paul, but he cannot perform/work/do that which he knows to be upright. He expresses this with the concluding words of v18, "I find not."

Paul uses εὐρισκω, from which we get our English word "Eureka!, (I found it!)." There was a search on for Paul in his battle with the 10th commandment and covetousness (7:7-11), yet he could not find the answer to victory. What he did find is shared with us in v18; he had neither the power to vanquish sin, nor the ability to perform the holiness he approved of. For Paul, in light of his impotence, he could not find (εὐρισκω!) the "how" of overcoming indwelling sin.

19 For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.

The similarities between our verse here and v15 should be noted if only to remind ourselves that the first clause of v15 is a summary expression and is implied here. Paul experienced the conflict of knowing and willing the good, but practicing the evil (for more, see notes v15).

If some time can be taken to compare the last two clauses of v15 with v19, the importance of Paul's initial words in v15 will be evident. This is the original text:

v15b -→ ου γαρ ο θελω τουτο πρασσω
english not for that I will this I practice
which

v19a -→ ου γαρ ο θελω ποιω αγαθον
english not for that I will I do good
which

v15c → αλλα ο μισω τουτο ποιω
english but that I hate this I do
which

verse 19b → αλλα ο ου θελω κακον τουτο
english but that not I will evil this
πρασσω (I practice)

The agreement between v15b/v19a and v15c/v19b both tells us that Paul's experience is an integral part of his argument, and his initial words of v15a (“that which I do I allow [understand] not”) gives us the bewilderment of a man who has such an experience as is found in v15b-15c and its parallel, v19a-19b (comp “find not” in v18).

Note as well that v19 fills in some words that we assumed were true of v15. In v19, Paul's "would do's" are related to that which is "good" (v19), and what he actually did (and hated) was "evil" (v19). What is implicit in v15 is spelled out in v19.

We might want to ask at this point how it might be possible for an unregenerate Jew such as Paul to wish to do good, for Paul will say clearly in Romans 8:8 that the carnal mind is an enemy of God's law and cannot be subject to such law (and there are many such verses in Scripture). Yet there are many passages of Scripture that testify to a religious delight in God and his law. Herod delighted to hear John the Baptist (Mk 6:20), and Paul stated that his unregenerate brethren approved of the law (Rom 2:17,18). The clear distinction between true and false expressions of loving God's law is the doing (more will be said about this in v22). Our works testify that our love is wrought by God in the heart. Our works do not make us a "good tree," but they do prove that we have been made a good tree by God's grace (Matt 12:33-35).

20 Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.

It is difficult to decide whether v20 is a summary reiteration of v.v.17-19, or a starting point for v.v.21-23. We have put our verse as a concluding reiteration of part 2 because of the strength of v21 as a starting point for part 3 (v21-23) of 7:13-25.

Let us again examine the greek of v20:

v20a → εἰ δε ο ου θελω εγω τουτο ποιω
if and that not wish I this I do
which

v16a → εἰ δε ο ου θελω εγω τουτο ποιω
if and that not wish I this I do
which

v20b → ουκετι εγω κατεργαζομαι αυτο αλλ η
no longer I working it but the
οικουσα εν εμοι αμαρτια
dwelling in me sin

v17 → ουκετι εγω κατεργαζομαι αυτο αλλ η
no longer I work it but the
οικουσα εν εμοι αμαρτια
dwelling in me sin

This should be enough to let us see Paul's intent in v20. In v20, Paul combines v16a and v17. We see as well that Paul's "no longer I...but sin" has a twofold deduction; to vindicate the law (16b), and condemn sin (v20b). To repeat; "no longer I...but sin (16b/20a) means both vindication for the law and condemnation for sin (17/20b).

We have now completed part 2 of the section 7:13-25. We saw the theme of vindication (of the law) in part 1 (7:13-16). In part 2 (7:17-20), Paul has turned to indictment - the indictment of sin.

Verse 17 identifies, v18 elucidates, and v19 expresses, and v 20 concludes. He will reiterate (cf. v15) such that we will reach the same truth a second time (comp v17 and v20). In essence, Paul wants to insure our comprehension of indwelling sin and its consequences upon the “carnal” man (v14).

21 I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.

All this experience and reflection has brought the apostle to a deduction (v21) which he will expound upon (v.v. 22-23). We must be as careful here with Paul's statement of "evil present with me" as we were with "in me, (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing." The "presentness" of evil (or sin) might give us an idea of inactivity, or at least passiveness with respect to this evil/sin. We may surmise that the sin that indwells us is not as virulent as has been described in v17 and v20 (which are just conclusions to v.v.13-16 and v.v.18-19). As we shall see in v23, this "present evil/sin" of v21 will "war" against us and make us captives!

Paul starts part 3 of Romans 7:13-25 (v.v. 21-23) by establishing a "law." This is not related to the law of commandments/Old Testament or law vs. grace, but is "law" which is equivalent to "principle" or "rule." There are many such uses of "law" (greek, νομος). Paul speaks of "the law of her husband" (Rom 7:2), "I see another law" (Rom 7:23), and "the law of the Spirit of Life" (Rom 8:2).

Now Paul's principle or rule is this; whenever he "wills," "wishes," or in general both understands and wants to do the law of the Lord, he is not alone with just his good intentions to do the good. Close by is evil in a way that will be explained in v.v.22-23.

Paul has always kept in the background of his discourse the great reasons for the gospel. One of those is Romans 7:4, where Paul says that to bear fruit to God we must be free/dead to the law and united to Christ. This is because we need One greater, "Spirit," v6, to mortify the flesh (Rom 8:13) and offer up spiritual sacrifices (1 Pet 2:5). As the book of Hebrews says, it is by Him we are able to offer the sacrifices of praise which are pleasing to Almighty God (Heb 13:15,16). In v21, Paul has his "good." Yet close by is evil such that the good he might do he cannot. That which prevented Paul from accomplishing the righteousness he knew and taught as a Pharisee was this "presence" of evil and sin. This was his great struggle when it came to the 10th commandment (Rom 7:7-11), and it is that struggle and defeat that caused him to reflect upon himself as not just "carnal," but "sold under sin."

22 For I delight in the law of God after the inward man:

In v22, we encounter one of the more persuasive reasons that many great expositors have been persuaded that this R7 man is indeed a christian. Along with v16 and Paul's "I consent with the law that it is good," we have here a "delight" in the law of God. This is forceful in light of the "enmity" of the "carnal" mind against God's law (Rom 8:7), as well as man's general darkness of mind (Eph 4:17-19). Unsaved man is dead in sin (Eph 2:1), and has a reprobate mind (Rom 1:28). How could this man, who is unregenerate, delight in anything as noble as God's law?

Let us consider four lines of proof :

- 1 The writer of the famous Matthew Henry commentary on Romans, Dr. John Evans, writes of the application that can be made to the unsaved in Romans seven (although his position is that this passage relates better to the christian). In so doing, he quotes passages that are of interest because they are of unsaved persons. In Numbers 24:3-4, we see the ungodly prophet Balaam with his "eyes open," even though a child of perdition (2 Pet 2:15; Jude 11). Evans quotes Isaiah 58:2, which speaks of ungodly Israelites who "seek me," "delight to know my ways," and "delight...to approach God." Other examples not quoted by Evans can be given from the Old Testament regarding the Jew and his delight in God and His ways, although the context makes clear such persons are unregenerate.
- 2 Although the verb translated "delight" (συνηδομαι) in v22 is only used once in the New Testament, a related word (ηδεως/adverb) is used in two interesting places which reference unsaved persons (the word itself is found a total of four times in the New Testament). In Mark 12:37, this adverb is used of the common people who heard Him (Christ) "gladly"(ηδεως). In Mk 6:20, the Scripture speak of Herod

who heard John the Baptist “gladly” (ηδεως). Both instances clearly speak of the delight of unregenerate men (in the first case, at least some were unregenerate). To say that the unregenerate cannot at all delight in God’s Word/God’s law is not born out by Scripture. They can in an unregenerate/natural sense.

3 Fruits of the Spirit that are exercised by saints (such as delight in spiritual truths/matters) are found in a “natural” form in the unregenerate. In Hebrews 12:29, the Jews from Egypt are listed with Noah, Moses and others as ones who had faith - in their case to cross through the Red Sea. Yet these same people are condemned in Heb 3:16-19 as provoking the Lord, and in Heb 4:2 as not having faith! Unsaved man can mimic aspects of redemptive man such as knowledge and joy. They can take an intellectual delight in the law. But in the final analysis, Christ will say “I never knew you” to all those who do not obey Him (Matt 7:21-23). It is the doing that proves whether our delight in the law is of God is true, christian delight (James 2:14ff).

4 Romans 2:17-18 reads as follows; “Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast in God, and knowest His will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law.” Note these people Paul is writing to Jews he will later say are both “under sin” and “guilty before God” (Rom 3:9,19). He says of the average unsaved Jew that he “rests in the law,” “makes his boast in God,” “know(s) and approve(s) God’s will and the more excellent things...instructed out of the law.” All this fits with “delight” in the law (v22).

The false assumption is that this “delight” must be a true, christian delight. But this is not necessarily so. This idea arises, probably, from the fact that this delight originates from the “inner man,” v22, and that such a term equals “regenerate man.” Yet all research that this writer has done reflects a unity of definition for

“inner man” in v22 as equal to “my mind” in v23 (re-read the text and I think the reader will agree). Notwithstanding such a clear passage as Eph 3:16, where the “inner man” is assuredly regenerate, our context dictates that inner man = mind.

23 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.

Paul has stated in v22 that he has an inner delight in the law of God. This statement is, of course, just another way of saying “the good I would,” v19 or “when I would do [lit] the good,” v21. Further, let us not forget the other “mind” terms used by Paul: “would” (v15,19,21), “wish” (v18), and, later on, “mind” is used again (v25).

Now this delight comes into conflict with another law which wars against his delight/wishing/willing. This is the delight in his mind warring against the sin in his members. The power behind the presence of that which is good is the mind of Paul. The power behind his warring opposition is the presence of SIN. Another way to see v 22 and v23 is the law of God in Paul’s mind vs. the law of sin in Paul’s members.

Now whereas Colossians 3:5 calls upon us to mortify our members, and Romans 6:13 and 6:19 command us to yield our members as instruments of righteousness; yet there is an important difference in these passages in juxtaposition to the Romans seven passage. The Colossians/Romans type of commands have a decidedly positive view as to our ability to obey, and a positive view as to the outcome of our labors in holiness. Such is NOT the case here in v23. Indeed, just as sure as we take sin captive in 2 Cor 10:5, the R7 man is taken captive here (the greek word translated “captive,” αιξμαλωτιζω, is used three times in the New Testament - beside here and 2 Cor 10:5, see Lk 21:24, a use related to the sack of Jerusalem in A.D. 70).

Let us remind ourselves that the word “captive,” αιξμαλωτιζω, is a greek present participle. The means that the activity of that sin which enslaves us is a constant activity and captivity. As unsaved, we bring our desire for righteousness to please God and do his law. But our continual experience, related by Paul in Rom 7:15,19, is one of frustration and defeat (historically, this is the experience of many spiritual greats prior to conversion such as George Whitfield, John Bunyan, C.H. Spurgeon, etc, etc.).

Again, as in v17 and v20, it is sin that rules this man in Romans seven. It is the “law of sin... in my members,” or “indwelling sin,” that makes this man a passive servant to evil (cf. “it is no more I that do it”). His end in inevitably captivity and servitude. This is why “sold under sin,” v14 is such a proper portrait to this “carnal” man.

24 O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

Clearly this cry of despair is the natural result of a man who is a slave. The “who?” of v24 gives us the pervasive perplexity of someone who did not understand what he did (v15) because, although he desired to do what was his delight (the good), he found himself in captivity - crying out for deliverance here. Indeed, Paul’s statement in greek; ταλαιπωρος εγω ανθρωπος,

[wretched I! Man]

is emphatic, poignant, and comprehensive. The experience of the war against sin and sin’s continual victory brings hopelessness and a cry for redemption.

Note #1: Paul’s “body of death” in v24 is the same as “the (his) body of indwelling, that is, dominating sin.”

Note#2: There is a point that might be made here which is one of the surest proofs that the R7 man of Romans 7:14-25 is an unsaved, unregenerate man. The proof is threefold, and comes from combining the ideas of v.v.23 and 24.

- 1 Leaving out some of Paul’s words in these most important verse, we come up with the combined truth; “bringing me into captivity to the law of sin...”(v23) and “who shall deliver me from this body of death” (v24).
- 2 The summary conclusion of Romans 1-7 is Romans 8:1-4. We find in v2, “the law of the Spirit of life hath set me free from the law of sin and death.” It should be clear from both the words of the verse and its context that “the law of the Spirit of life” is the renewed life of the christian, whereas “the law of sin and death” is the contrasting phrase of an unregenerate man.
- 3 In conclusion, it is unequivocal that the phrase “the law of

sin and death” from Romans 8:2 is derived from Romans 7:23-24.

- 4 → Therefore, the man who is identified as being captive in v23, and needing deliverance in v24, could not be a christian.**

25 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.

As a christian, Paul has surveyed his tragic past, and those issues pertaining to his life as sinner. But he is determined to bring us immediately back to the gospel which delivered him, and the great God and Savior of that gospel.

The only remedy to the slavery of human sin and the bondage of life is the Lord of Glory. The grace that God gives reigns through righteousness (Rom 5:21). Indeed, those who have this abounding grace have in them the power of God, that power (“glory,” KJV) God bestowed in raising Christ from the dead (Rom 6:4). Those who are justified freely (Rom 3:24) are also more than conquerors (Rom 8:37). In other words, all those God forgives He makes holy. They can do all things through Christ (Phil 4:13). We are certainly not in the bondage of Romans seven. Christ has set us free (Gal 5:1).

The first words of v25 answer the despondency of v24. But what of v25b? Those who have written on Romans grapple with the reason for these final words of Romans seven. They seem so out of place. It is for certain they are not related to v24 and v25a.

Yet a brief glance at the wording brings all of Romans seven before our eyes. It seems to be a final summary of the truths in 7:13-25. Paul speaks of the “law of God” and the “law of sin,” terminology we have seen previous to this (see 7:23). Also, we saw that the law of God was a delight of the mind - or inner man - whereas the law of sin was the criminal element that took captive the “I/εγω” of this section of the Word.

It seems that Paul wanted to include a final word on the subjects of “I/εγω” vs. the law or rule of indwelling sin. Paul even further emphasizes the personal nature of this conflict/war of himself against the sin indwelling by beginning v25b with the rare greek “αυτοσ εγω!” (I myself!). This is his fight - apart from the indwelling Spirit - against SIN. But he is “carnal,” and the power of sin is what dictates his life, such that he has spoken of his life as being ruled by sin (cf. “it is no longer I that do it, but sin,” v.v17,20).

Thus, Paul’s “with my mind I serve the law of God, but with the

flesh, the law of sin,” is a concluding summary of the “I/εγω” and his delight and wish to do God’s law, in opposition to the fact of his flesh “doing/serving” the law of sin. This was Paul argument throughout 7:14-24.

Note: From v25, we see again that the man who serves the “law of sin” is an unsaved man if we compare v25 to Paul’s use of “law of sin” in Rom 8:2 (which is most assuredly predicated of an unsaved man).

Romans 8:1-4: Paul's conclusions on Chapters 1-7

Romans 8:1-4

1 There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.

3 For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:

4 That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

There are many profound and wonderful truths in this section of Scripture, but the two statements that concern our understanding of Romans seven are: 1) the phrase of v3; “what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh,” and 2) a brief review of 8:2.

As for Paul and God's law vs. his efforts, (“what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh,” i.e. his will), is there a more appropriate way to describe the impotent efforts of man to fulfill the law's righteousness?

The law is weak. This is not by reason of its nature, but as it is mediated through the carnal vessel of man. The goodness of the law is hindered, then prohibited by unregenerate man from glorifying God (cf. “the carnal/σαρκι/fleshly man cannot please [glorify] God,” Rom 8:8, compare Rom 3:23; 1 Cor 10:31). The reason is man's pervasive, sinful nature; a nature polluting his body, and as a consequence, his spirit. The result is, instead of desiring God, his desires turn to sinful lusts (1 Pet 4:2,3; 2 Pet 2:10).

The efforts of keeping the law are fruitless, so long as we are without the adoption of the Spirit and his indwelling instead have indwelling sin. We are impotent when under law and not grace. Most

important, Paul wants us to grasp that apart from the Risen Lord, man is absolutely incapable of the holiness defined by God's law and personalized by Christ's life. Yet this is the goal Paul perused in vain as an unsaved man - and v24 was the result .

NOTE: Again, the two most powerful proofs of Romans 7 being an unregenerate man are:

1) the phrase "law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus" is in stark contrast to "law of sin and death," Rom 8:2. And assuredly the former phrase speaks of a christian while the latter is an unsaved man. But as sure, the phrase "law of sin and death" is derived from Romans 7:23-24: "...law of sin which is in my members...v.24 "who shall deliver me from this body of death."

2) Romans 8:3 and "what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh" is just an echo of Romans 7:14,18,23.

3) There is no greater proof (despite Augustine's errors here in Romans 7) of the LACK of freedom in man's will, and his ability to come ro Christ via the power of that will, cf. Jn 3:17-21; 6:43-44;64-65.

Application

Although this paper is not in agreement with historic Reformed/Puritan thinking, we will follow their leadership in applying the truth of the Word as we close our examination.

1] There is no greater display of man's inability to do anything to redeem himself, including faith. The general teaching of our day is that man cannot save himself by works, but can save himself by faith. But if the highest and most noble of man's acts is to believe (Heb 11:6), then he certainly is unable to do so. Romans seven, if it teaches us anything, teaches man cannot do the good (7:19). Man has no free will, but rather is a slave to sin (John 8:34). This is because he is dead in sin (Eph 2:1), with a mind in darkness, and heart blind and ignorant (Eph 4:17-19). And this is why the gospel must be the power of God (Rom 1:16; 1 Thess 1:5). Salvation is the work of Almighty power.

2] Our spiritual identity as Christians is not derived from Romans 7:13-25! We can do all things through Christ; we are more than conquerors; if we walk in the Spirit, we will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh (Phil 4:13; Rom 8:37; Gal 5:16). We are able to mortify sin, and yield our members to righteousness (Col 3:5; Rom 6:13,19). The habit (present tense) of the R7 man is similar to John's statement in 1 John 3:10, "he that doeth (practices) not righteousness is not of God..."