

Romans 7:14-25
“The Pig and the Prodigal”

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I. Intro

Having explained what the law is supposed to do, Paul now explains what the law cannot do.

1. Vs. 14 *The law cannot change you*: Even though it is holy, just, good, and spiritual, it nonetheless lacks the power. *The old nature knows no law, the new nature needs no law*.
2. Vs. 15-21 *The law cannot enable you to do good*: It is clear by the many uses of personal pronouns that Paul was having a problem with “*self*”. Our mind, will, and body can either be controlled by the old nature or the new nature the flesh or the spirit. That’s the questions Paul asks; “*How can I do the good I want?*” “*How can I not do the evil I don’t want?*”
3. Vs. 21-25 *The Law cannot set you free*: How frustrating it is to exert all your energy in trying to live a good life only to discover that your best is not good enough. Is there any deliverance? Yes thank God! The secret of doing good and not doing evil is to yield to the Holy Spirit.

Some folks that have read this have become convinced that Paul was a golfer and reading verse 15 I can see how they come to that conclusion: “*For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do.*” But what Paul is talking

about is much more serious than a game of golf and it is something that based upon the original language was a personal experience at the present time that he was writing this letter.

II. Vs. 14-19 What's my problem

Vs. 14 The 2nd half of chapter 7 Paul addresses the truth that the law, ill respective of how holy it is, **cannot restrain a carnal man (the "flesh")**. The word in the Greek means, "*characterized by the flesh*" and speaks of the person who can and should do differently but does not. Notice that be the use of personal pronouns "*I*" and "*me*"; Paul does not excuse himself as a person in this view. He describes his condition as "*Sold under sin*". He is in bondage under sin and the knowledge that he is isn't helping him out. Like a man arrested for a crime and thrown in jail; the law will only help a person out if he is innocent but offers no help for the person who is guilty and in fact the law argues against him, not for him.

Folk's, just because Paul says that he is carnal, doesn't mean that he was not a Christian.

The truth is his awareness of his carnality is evidence that God has done a work in him. His condition is not one that he is happy about nor one that he is justifying it is one that he recognizes and is tortured over even though he understands that the law is good it's killing him.

Vs. 15-19 So what does he do with this condition? What everybody does, try to do what is right in our own strength. And in this Paul discovers **three realities in verse 15:**

- A. Vs. 15a "*For **what I am doing**, I do not understand*": **His problem wasn't desire**; he wanted to do what is right. His heart said, "*There are things I would love to do right, but I just can't seem to do them.*"
- B. Vs. 15b "*For **what I will to do***": **His problem wasn't knowledge**; he knows what the right thing is. His heart said, "*There things I don't want to do, yet I keep finding myself doing those things.*"

C. Vs. 15c “*that I do not practice*”: *His problem was a lack of power*: how to perform what is good I do not find. He lacks power because the law gives no power.

Vs. 16-17 Paul says as a born-again Christian he now has *a conscience* that agrees with what is right, but he also discovered that there is something else within him that rises up and says, “NO!” So that even though he was determined to do what was right and not do what was wrong he found his determination wilted as the law says: “*Here are the rules and you had better keep them.*” But it gives us no power for keeping the law. In verse 17 Paul seems to be offering up an excuse in the sentence “*But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.*” But he is not denying his responsibility as he recognizes that as he sins, he acts against his nature as a new man in Jesus Christ. As such he owns up to his sin but realizes that the impulse to sin does not come from who he really is in Jesus Christ. The Rabbi’s taught that everyman had two natures: “*Yetser hatob*” and “*Yetser hara*” and they could choice to which nature ruled their actions.

Our redeemed heart never wants to do anything other than what our loving heavenly Father has told us, but our old flesh is the exact opposite. And the problem is that we are made in such a way that our will power is never enough to keep us from sin!

Vs. 18-19 Paul came to understand that he had a battle between two selves. C.S. Lewis wrote that “*Anyone who has tried to do good is aware of this struggle. We never know how hard it is to stop sinning until we try. No man knows how bad he is until he has tried to be good.*”

Whenever we are disappointed at ourselves it’s an indication that we have either forgotten this verse or don’t believe it. Paul says, “*nothing*” not “*something*” or “*a few things*”! Oh, what a difference between what the world says that “*we are all basically good*” and what the Bible says about Christians that “*nothing good dwells in my flesh*”. Yet when I become upset at myself, bummed out at my failures God has to remind me, “*Hey child of mine, why are you so*

depressed, didn't I write to you that there was nothing good about your old self. Now you have yet another reason to believe Me and my word!"

III. Vs. 20-23 The bad side of good

Vs. 20 In Luke 11:11-32 Jesus told the parable of the “*Prodigal Son*” and this story illustrates how you can differentiate between a pig and a prodigal. Take a pig out of a pigpen, any pig you want, wash him up in a special tub with special soap, and give him the real “*spa treatment*”. Spray him with Channel # 9 and dress him up in a white tux with tails then take him out into a clean environment with the finest furnishings except in one small corner dig a whole fill it with mud water and all sorts of stench and watch what happens to your pig in only a few minutes. Why that reformed pig will do what all pigs do he will go right back as soon as possible and make his home in that slop. The prodigal on the other hand will find himself in the mud from time to time but he will never be comfortable making the pit his home.

Vs. 21-23 Our eyes are prone to looking where they shouldn't, our ears often try to hear something they shouldn't and our tongues wag around in our mouths more than a dog's tail spreading junk about others. “*What's the matter with me? Why can't I do what is right? Why am I so weak?*” Believers are perfect with regards to their justification, but their sanctification is only begun and is a progressive work. Some have experienced more trials with their soul and have awakened to a sense of their lost condition quicker to proclaim “*O wretched man that I am.*”

IV. Vs. 24-25 The answer is a Who not a how

Vs. 24-25 The Greek is literally, “*Wretched through the exhaustion of hard labor.*” Paul had referred to himself some 40 times since Rom. 7:13 in his unsuccessful struggle against sin and in so doing he became entirely self-focused and self-obsessed. He is completely worn out yet wretched because of his unsuccessful effort to please God under the principle of Law. If you read

the older commentaries as I do you will see that the writers do not say, “*How good I am!*” Rather, they are apt to bewail their sinfulness. When Paul writes the phrase “*from this body of death*” he is making a reference to ancient kings who tormented their prisoners by shackling them to decomposing corpses. Paul longs to be cut free from the wretched body of death clinging to him. Right here we arrive at the “*Sermon on the Mount*” in Matthew 5 where Jesus said, “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*” Blessed is the person who has come to the end of themselves, who has come to understand that they are spiritually bankrupt and cries out “*I’m a wretched person.*” *That is our battle getting to the place where we are no longer trying to control sin in our lives but our determination.* Paul’s struggle ended when he realized that what he need wasn’t to be found in “*what*” but rather *in a Who!* Far too much of our lives have been in search for WHAT:

- *Program*
- *Procedure*
- *Principle*

As long as our quest is after the what and not the Who we will remain in our struggle because the Bible doesn’t offer us the any answers in what it only offers one answer in Who, Jesus! The answer is not in theology it is in Jesus personally! This is difficult for us:

- *Because of Jesus on the cross, the penalty of sin was paid*
- *Because of Jesus on the cross, the power of sin was broken*
- *Because of Jesus on the cross, my preoccupation with sin has been eliminated*

The entire tone of the statement reveals how desperate Paul was for deliverance. He is overwhelmed with a sense of his own powerlessness and sinfulness. We must come to the same

place of desperation to find victory. Such a battle with the flesh as I mentioned before leads a person to become either a “*quitter*” or a “*pretender*”. Yet there is another alternative to “*quitting*” and “*pretending*” it’s “**turning**”! The words “*Who will deliver me*” show that Paul has given up on himself, and asks “**Who** will deliver me?” Instead of “**How** will I deliver myself?” But Paul’s “turning” isn’t to some new program, some new teaching or technique. NO, his turning is to the very same Person who he turned to save his soul Jesus!

The cry went out in verse 24b “*Who shall save me from this body of death*” and as such the question was asked correctly but it was also answered correctly, “*I thank God –through Jesus Christ our Lord.*” Finally, Paul looks outside of himself to Jesus. ***Jesus didn't come and die just to give us more or better rules, but to live out victory through those who believe.*** Paul never found any peace, any praising God until he looked outside of himself and beyond the law to his Savior, Jesus Christ. Friends we don’t need:

- A “***teacher***” to show us a better way of doing what we cannot do, we need a Savior!
- A “***coach***” to motivate us and encourage us to do what we still cannot do; we need a Savior.
- A “***doctor***” to diagnose your problem to do what we still cannot do
- We need a **Savior!**