

I DO WHAT I DO NOT WANT TO DO

Romans 7:14-24 by Abri Brancken

Romans 7 – session 2, 2 Jul 2017

UNDERSTANDING ROMANS 7 CONTEXT

In Romans 7 Paul makes some statements that seem to contradict what he just said and what he will say in future chapters. Let's read it.

SCRIPTURE

Romans 7:14-24

Rom 7:14 For we are conscious that the law is of the spirit; but I am of the flesh, given into the power of sin.

Rom 7:15 And I have no clear knowledge of what I am doing, for that which I have a mind to do, I do not, but what I have hate for, that I do.

Rom 7:16 But, if I do that which I have no mind to do, I am in agreement with the law that the law is good.

Rom 7:17 So it is no longer I who do it, but the sin living in me.

Rom 7:18 For I am conscious that in me, that is, in my flesh, there is nothing good: I have the mind but not the power to do what is right.

Rom 7:19 For the good which I have a mind to do, I do not: but the evil which I have no mind to do, that I do.

Rom 7:20 But if I do what I have no mind to do, it is no longer I who do it, but the sin living in me.

Rom 7:21 So I see a law that, though I have a mind to do good, evil is present in me.

Rom 7:22 In my heart I take pleasure in the law of God,

Rom 7:23 But I see another law in my body, working against the law of my mind, and making me the servant of the law of sin which is in my flesh.

Rom 7:24 How unhappy am I! who will make me free from the body of this death?

Summary of Rom 7:14-24

Paul says that he finds himself doing the very things he does not want to do. He also struggles to do what he knows he should do. Why? Because evil is present in him. But, what is the context in which Paul speaks? It is very important to look at the context of these statements of Paul.

PAUL LOOKS BACK AT HIS UNSAVED LIFE

According to Romans 6 and Romans 7:1-6, all Christians have been "freed from sin" and have become "slaves of righteousness."

"Sin shall not be master over" Christians, for they are "not under law, but under grace."

Christians have been “joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, that they might bear fruit for God. ”They “serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.”

Now, why does Paul say in Rom 7:14-24 the opposite, namely that the “law of sin” is working in us and that he is “a servant to the law of sin”. This contradicts previous and future passages.

PAUL IS ADDRESSING THOSE WHO KNOWS THE LAW

Rom 7:1 Is it not clear, my brothers I am using an argument to those who have knowledge of the law, that the law has power over a man as long as he is living? BBE

Rom 7:1 Or are you ignorant, brothers; for I speak to those who know the Law; that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? NKJV

But then a major turning point came in Paul's life. By the working of God's Spirit, “the commandment came” to him. He began to realise how deep and exacting the Law's requirements really are and how impossible it was for him to fulfil those requirements.

Paul describes a first-hand account of the “bondage to sin” experienced by those who are “in the flesh.” Now that he is a believer in Jesus Christ, he can clearly see the nature of the conflict that was formerly taking place in his life. For this reason, the terminology that Paul uses in these verses shows much Christian influence, though it is descriptive of his pre-Christian state.

The man described in Romans 7:7-25 is not the typical lost “man on the street,” who knows nothing of the spirituality or real desirability of the law. The man in Romans 7:7-25 is the man to whom “the commandment has come.”

Remember again Paul's controlling statement: “For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death.” “Flesh” is controlled by “sin,” and in the presence of Law the sinful passions of the flesh will always culminate in “death.”

THE TWO GROUPS OF PEOPLE

It is absolutely vital to realise that Paul thinks in terms of two and only two groups—those who are “under law” (“in the flesh”) and those who are “under grace” (“in the Spirit”).

There was a time when Paul lived under the Law. Where through his flesh he tried to be free from the power of sin over his life. Paul, in Romans 7:14-24 reference to his own experience with the Law prior to conversion. Paul is

addressing those who are familiar with the Law. He shares with them his experience in trying to keep the Law, but without success.

SIN WANTS TO DO WHAT THE LAW PROHIBITS

Confessions by Augustine

In his book Confessions, the great theologian of the ancient church Augustine described how this dynamic worked in his life as a young man: "There was a pear tree near our vineyard, laden with fruit. One stormy night we rascally youths set out to rob it and carry our spoils away. We took off a huge load of pears - not to feast upon ourselves, but to throw them to the pigs, though we ate just enough to have the pleasure of forbidden fruit. They were nice pears, but it was not the pears that my wretched soul coveted, for I had plenty better at home. I picked them simply in order to become a thief. The only feast I got was a feast of iniquity, and that I enjoyed to the full. What was it that I loved in the theft? Was it the pleasure of acting against the law? The desire to steal was awakened simply by the prohibition of stealing."

Prohibition Act

In American history, we know that the Prohibition Act didn't stop drinking. In many ways, it made drinking more attractive to people, because of our desire to break boundaries set by the commandment. More law does not help. There needs to be a character, a nature change.

Once God draws a boundary for us, we are immediately enticed to cross that boundary - which is no fault of God or His boundary, but the fault of our sinful hearts. Rebellion is rooted in the heart of man. The weakness of the law isn't in the law - it is in us. Our hearts are so wicked that they can find an opportunity for all manner of evil desire from something good like the law of God.

"The word opportunity in the original is a military term meaning a base of operations. Prohibition furnishes a springboard from which sin is all too ready to take off."

No fishing from the balconies

A waterfront hotel in Florida was concerned that people might try to fish from the balconies, so they put up signs saying, "NO FISHING FROM THE BALCONY." They had constant problems with people fishing from the balconies, with lines and sinker weights breaking windows and bothering people in rooms below. They finally solved the problem by simply taking down the signs - and no one thought to fish from the balconies. Because of our hearts, the law can actually work like an invitation to sin.

- Sin falsely promises satisfaction
- Sin falsely claims an adequate excuse
- Sin falsely promises an escape from punishment
- Sin falsely pretends to be a gateway towards freedom, pleasure and success.

One of Satan's greatest deceptions is to get us to think of sin as something good that an unpleasant God wants to deprive us of. When God warns us away from sin, He warns us away from something that will kill us.

WHO WILL SAVE US FROM SIN?

"Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"

Paul's answer to this cry is given in v.25,

"Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

More fully in 8:1-4, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did...in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit."

The law of sin and death (Rom 8:2) draws us towards sin. On the other hand, when we are born again, the law of the Spirit (Rom 8:2) rules in us. The law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. - Rom 8:2

Notice Paul's summary here of what he has just said at length in 7:14-25: "...what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh..."! And notice again his description of those who are Christians: "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death...that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit"! The man of Romans 7 cries, "Who will set me free?" The Christian replies, "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free."

CONCLUSION:

In Christ, we are truly free from the power of sin and death.

Discussion Questions for our Life Groups

1. *If we have been set free from the law of sin and death, why do we sometimes struggle with sin so much?*
2. *What do you think this phrase means: "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death". What is the implication of this truth to our lives?*
3. *How can we effectively walk in the Spirit on a day to day basis?*