

Romans 7:14-25

We are embarking on the hardest passage in chapter 7 of Romans. The scholars are all over the chart on this passage. Some say authoritatively that this is only referring to Paul in a pre-regenerate state. Some say that it could only be referring to Paul in a regenerate state. And all of them have some good points. It all depends on what you take literally and what you take experientially or figuratively. It is very difficult to interpret.

I would like to approach this in the way that is most beneficial to me in the hope that it may best help you. I think that Mike is best prepared to shape this study going forward. But I would like to put limits on this passage so that whatever you conclude, it will not take you out of bounds of the context of Romans and the context of the rest of scripture.

There are two concepts we have to consider when we interpret this passage. The first is Flesh. The second is law.

Notice the references to flesh that surround this passage. First we have verse 5.

Chapter 7:5 Begins- *For when we were **in the flesh***

(This is talking about being positionally in the flesh. This is clearly speaking of an unbeliever, an unregenerate person),

the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death.

Then in verse 6 Paul goes on to say-

*But now we have been **delivered from the law**, having died to what we were held by*

(This is clearly a **new position completely different from the verse above it. This person is now dead to the law's condemnation and sin's power**),

He continues- *so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.*

Now before we go any further these two verses are very useful in defining the views that are most commonly held regarding our current text. So let's look at them in that framework.

Here are the views we will be looking at.

First we will look at what we will call the **unregenerate view**. This view is based on the person described in verse 5. This view describes the **continual normal state** of an **unregenerate** person.

Second we will look at what we will call the **regenerate view**. This view is based on the person described in verse 6. This view describes the **continual normal state** of a **regenerate** person.

Third we will look at the possibility of a **split view**. This is based on the option of a change in status based on the word "now" in verse 17. So the first portion of the text would refer to the **unregenerate view** and the second would refer to the **regenerate view**.

Fourth we will look at what we will call the **carnal view**. This view is based on the person described in verse 6. This view describes the **continual normal state** of a **regenerate person** in this **rebellious disobedient carnal state**. I will deal with this view primarily to show that it violates scripture from beginning to end and should be resisted.

Then fifth we will look at a view we will call the **transition view**. This view is based on the transition between verse 5 and verse 6 when the Holy Spirit is waking up a person to the truth of the laws powerlessness to save and a man's inability to fulfill the laws demands. This view describes the **temporary** journey of Paul's from being a self righteous Pharisee to being a truly regenerate person.

Now back to the context. We were talking about the flesh sandwich. Flesh is mentioned in verse 5. It is again mentioned in Chapter 8:1-8

*1There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk **according to the flesh**, but according to the Spirit.*

Note that being positionally in Christ and walking according to the flesh are mutually exclusive. A person cannot have his life

defined as being in Christ and also defined as walking according to the flesh at the same time. There is no such thing as a believer who walks according to the flesh as a way of life. These are two different positions and they are mutually exclusive.

*2For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. 3For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, 4that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. 5For those who **live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh**, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. **6For to be carnally minded is death**, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. 7Because **the carnal mind is enmity against God**; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. 8So then, those who are **in the flesh cannot please God**.*

(Note that those in the position of the flesh cannot please God. Those who are in the position of being in Christ cannot be in the position of the flesh and Christ at the same time. We are either in Christ or in the flesh but we cannot be in both. But we can, as Christians, have outbreaks of flesh or be influenced by flesh. We still have flesh. We still have the remnants of sin in our bodies. We have old habits, old thoughts, old desires. These shouldn't be a surprise. Their existence is normal to a believer. But catering to the behavior and thoughts that the flesh encourages is not normal. It is forbidden.)

So we see this passage is surrounded by clear teaching about positional-ly being in the flesh and positional-ly being in the Spirit.

The next thing we see is the context of **the law**. Paul is speaking about one general topic as he enters this passage. He is talking about how a person cannot be justified or sanctified by his own personal record of obeying the law. The law doesn't have that effect. But that isn't because the law is bad. It is because

we are bad. So we can't launch into a bunch of applications of this passage that have nothing to do with the law. We've got to keep it in the context of the law's powerlessness to save us.

We have also seen clearly that this is not a doctrinal teaching passage, as much as it is an explanation of how Paul has experienced this truth in his life. We know that he is using some figurative language. If we were to take all this language as literal we could make no sense of the book of Romans. He would be saying things in Chapters 1-6 and then unsaying them in Chapter 7. That is not an option if what the Bible says about itself is true.

So we have some "give" on the meaning of the words. We do not need to interpret them as strictly as we would in some of his more technical teaching passages. We should read this as a letter from a friend telling us about his experience. It will not counter the points he has made previously.

Now that we have briefly touched on the context, let's begin on looking at the 5 views.

Before we do I want to say that it is very important that you pour yourself into the study of this passage as well. We can have different views on the meaning of this passage but we should all have done the homework it takes to clarify what the passage says and means by the process of study.

Now- the unregenerate view.

First, these are a few of the reasons that some believe this passage is speaking of an unregenerate person.

1. This was the prevailing view of the Greek fathers of the early church.
2. The phrases, "Sold as a slave to sin" and "carnal" or "unspiritual" appear to best apply to an unbeliever.
3. Chapter's 6 main theme was the freedom from sin and the freedom from slavery. To interpret this as now a believer referred to as a slave to sin seems difficult.
4. There is no mention of the Holy Spirit in this passage.

The unregenerate view would say that the "I am carnal" statement in verse 14 is the defining statement of the person's condition. It would say this person is positional-ly carnal. This person is, they would say, in the flesh positional-ly.

In that state even when they try to do good they are doing it for a carnal purpose and everything they do is sinful. They will find that sin will win in the end, no matter what they intend, because they are in the state of sin. They may have a cognitive recognition that the law is good, but they cannot by human effort keep it as it needs to be kept. Verse 17 however poses a problem to this view. It says "*it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.*" How can it not be I who does it? The I and the sin that dwells in me is synonymous in the life of a non-believer. There is no split personality in the unregenerate. The unregenerate view has to do some business here.

The unregenerate view explains this passage by saying that an unregenerate person is defined by their slavery. While the slave may appear to be acting according to the exercise of their will, they are really only carrying out their master's wishes. So it isn't that the use of the word "I" is intended to avoid responsibility. It is not like Paul is saying, "not I so don't blame me". It is more an expression of irrelevance. It is more like he is saying, "it's not I because the I that I thought was running the show is completely impotent". That "I" doesn't accomplish anything. The person involved may have all kind of opposing wishes or intentions, but they are irrelevant to day to day behaviors. It is the flesh that determines behavior, no matter what else may be going on underneath the hood.

Verse ¹⁸*For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells*

They would say that in trying to do good I can't do good.

; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. The best the non believer can do is intend to do good. They cannot bring themselves to be good and truly do good for holy motives. And they probably would have trouble

realizing that even their intentions to do good are fleshly motives as well.

They would see, if honest, that even the good they intend to do they can't carry out, but they do the opposite.

In verse 20 we revert back to the idea that sin defines the unregenerate's behavior. *²¹I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.*

The unregenerate finds that even when he intends to do good, there is an under-riding principle that commits evil. It is present all the time.

²²For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.

This delight would need to be the kind of delight that the Pharisees displayed. It was a hypocritical delight, a worship of the words but a hatred of its spirit.

²³But 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.

The unregenerate man can see this force, this law, this principle in his life continually being the source of his evil behavior. This force brings and keeps the unregenerate man in a state of sin that is in his flesh. He walks in the flesh because he **IS in flesh**. He can do no other.

²⁴O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

This final question according to this view would be, "I am the sinner, who can save me from sin, from this body of death?"

²⁵I 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.

This summary would restate the condition that the unregenerate is in. My mind wants to do some good things, some lofty things, but my flesh just keeps on doing what it has always done.

Now let's look at the regenerate view. This is the view I had prior to this study. This would mean that this is talking about the common normal continual state of an **regenerate person**.

A few reasons that people believe this view are:

1. This was the view of Augustine and the Reformers
2. Paul uses the present tense.
3. Paul's description of his pre-Christian life in Philippians 3:6 does not jibe with the description in Romans.
4. The progression of thought has been going from the unregenerate state in the beginning of Romans to the regenerate state in the last couple of chapters. It would be an abnormal regression to go back to the unregenerate state.
5. The conflict described is consistent with Gal 5:17
6. The power of self diagnosis is not in a sinner's capacity to do.
7. Desires for holiness can only be in a regenerate person.
8. The restatement in the last verse appears to imply what it describes is an ongoing state.

Let's take a look at how this view would interpret this passage.

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

This view would say that the statement "I am carnal" is not referring to the whole person. It is only referring to the fleshly part of a believer, the residual sin in a believer. Then when it says sold under sin it is only talking about the flesh. The flesh is condemned, sinful, and a slave. It is not and cannot be converted.

Sold under sin cannot mean that believers are living positional-ly under sin. Paul has already shown us that the believer has been set free from the power of sin. Sin no longer has dominion over a believer

¹⁵For 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.

Who of us as believers have not felt this way? We intend to love our brothers and sisters in Christ. So we do things that we think are loving. And at the same time we see selfish motives that we have never seen before. We desire to do a perfect good and we find that we only ever do a mixed good. You see, this view cannot be speaking of intentional evil. It cannot be talking about the continual state of disobedience in a believer. There are passages all through scripture that tell us that being a believer and being obedient are synonymous. Chapter 8 describes a believer as walking in the Spirit as opposed to walking in the flesh. So this cannot be talking about the process of knowing something is a sin and then deciding to do it anyway. Not if it is describing the common normal state of a believer. No, it must be speaking of the evil we find present with us when we are trying to do good. It is not intentional evil, but residual sin, that it must be speaking about. And once you put it into that framework it can fit the believer.

¹⁶If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good.

The regenerate man would say, yes the law of God is good. Everything God says and wants is good. He can easily agree because God has even put his law into the believer's heart. And even when we see evidence of selfishness and greed and envy and lust and coveting in our hearts, we say that the law is good and those attitudes and behaviors are bad.

¹⁷But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

Now, a believer can say that in a strict sense it was not the conscious mind of the believer that has chosen to exhibit the evil thing. No, it is better explained as a separate force. It is the residual sin in a believer's life showing itself to be present.

¹⁸For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.

It is easy to apply this to a believer. Paul specifies what he means by the phrase "in me". He means, in my flesh. The fleshly sinful residue from being in Adam has nothing good in it.

Now in me, the regenerate person we have Christ in us. So we could not make a blanket statement and say there is nothing good in a believer. But we can say there is nothing good in the fleshly part of us. So the believer can intent and will to do all kinds of good things. And he will. But that good will never be perfect. It will always be tainted by sin. It will always have a mixture of selfishness in it. God receives our faithful actions as good. They pass His scrutiny because the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself in love. But as long as we are in the flesh no action on our part is perfect.

John Stott at this point describes the two "I"s that are being referred to. He calls one the authentic I and the other the counterfeit I. Scripture often paints a picture of what Christ has done **for** and **to** a true believer. He has created a new creature. That is the genuine I. The counterfeit is the holdover fleshly attitudes and actions. It is not the real believer's identity in many senses, but it still appears to be an identity. Mr. Stott uses this to help understand the references to the different I's in this text.

¹⁹For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.

Again, this good cannot be referring to a simple act of obedience in the regenerate view. If that is the case we have believers who cannot obey. And after what we learned in chapters 5 and 6 that would be absurd. So the believer intends to do a perfect good but finds out there is evil we abhor that we find ourselves doing, often unknowingly.

²⁰Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

Again Paul explains why this happens. It is because of the sin that dwells in me. I haven't decided to do it. But I have done it none the less.

²¹I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.

The constant realization is that we have an enemy within us. We have a battle all the time. The flesh is always trying to

influence us in a sinful direction. I can decide to do good. But I will always perform less than I intend.

²²For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.

A believer has a new heart and has the law of God placed in it. So the regenerate man loves the law, agrees with it, says amen to it.

²³But 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.

But at the same time we see another influence in our members that is at war with the mind. And any submission to its influence puts us operationally under the captivity of the law, the force of sin that is in us. We are not positionally brought into captivity, but operationally brought into captivity.

²⁴O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

So living in this state, how will this ever be fixed? Who will fix it? Christ Jesus will. How? He will glorify us and we will be free from this flesh some day. In the mean time we are to walk according to the Spirit, even though we live in the flesh.

²⁵I 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.

And how do we explain the incongruity of position and operation now. We explain it by the two laws. The believer from the heart and mind serves the law of God. He walks according to the spirit. But as long as we are in flesh we will see the fleshly actions of sin as well.

Now let's take a brief look at the third view, the **Split View**. In Verse 17 it says "But now". It is possible that this is a transition from the unregenerate view to the regenerate view. If so, it does away with the difficulty of calling a believer carnal and sold to sin. This may be referring to a non-believer who is in the position of being carnal and sold to sin. And then Paul moves on to explain

how it is different when a person is a believer. The law's effect on an unbeliever is described differently than the law's effect on a regenerate man. So he goes on to explain how now, it is like two different people under one personality. This description can't be taken too far. But it is helpful in Paul's description. It helps us to understand what to think when a believer finds sin in his or her life.

I will address the last 2 views next week and will do more of a verse by verse approach with the last view.

I wanted to close this week with some references that will help us keep our views in the proper bounds.

When considering that the view of our text is about an unregenerate man, we must keep in mind that no person has the power to wake themselves from their stupor or become smart enough to chose salvation.

You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, (John 15:16 NKJV).

But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, (2 Thess. 2:13 NKJV).

Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, (Eph. 1:4 NKJV).

The very state that Paul displays in our text, if unregenerate, is completely powerless to do those things that he knows need to be done. So if you have never trusted Christ to save you this morning and you know that you too are powerless, but your heart is crying out- Who will save me from the wretched person I am?,

today may be the day you have been waiting for. Respond to Christ's call on your life. Repent of your sin. Trust in what he has done on the cross to count for you. Depend upon what he has done to save you. Come to him and He will in no way cast you out.

And for believers-

This is just a sound bite of verses in scripture outside of Romans that talk about this topic. The bottom line is that if a person is a believer, that person is an obey-er!

James 2:17 faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

In other words if it is just talking faith and it is not walking faith, it is false faith. Talk doesn't prove faith. Walk and talk does.

Titus 1:1 1Paul, a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect and the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness
The truth that every believer receives accords with godliness. Obedience is part of the package.

*Titus 2:11-14 11For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, 12teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, 13looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, 14who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us **from** every lawless deed and purify **for** Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.*

We see here **who** Christ died for and **what** he died for. Do we really think **what** Christ died for would be left undone in **Those** he died for? That makes a mockery of what Christ did.

Eph 2:10 10For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Here again we see that we were created in Christ Jesus for good works. If God created us for good works we can rest assured that good works is what God will get. A believer will obey.

John 14:23 23Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. 24He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me.

There are countless other texts I could have used. But this is all I am trying to say. Believers will obey. They will not do it perfectly, but there will be a very clear track record of obedience. And if they fail, they will not blame God for their failure. If you are clinging to a disobedience, something you know is wrong in your life, do not find comfort in your eternal security. You must do business with your sin. Your continued behavior is an evidence that **you may not be** secure, you may not be **in Christ**. You may be the unregenerate person described in the passage, unable to obey the thing that is right in your face to obey. Do not allow that state to continue. Call out to God and deal with your sin until you by faith obey.

And the last point- whatever you conclude from this study, do not settle into a view that gets you more comfortable with sin. Anything that encourages sin is satanic. The book of Romans is given to us to lead us into greater obedience. There are views of Romans 7 that are completely counter to what the book of Romans teaches. We will talk about one of those views next week. Guard yourselves from those views.