

## EXPOSITION OF ROMANS

### Message #26

### Romans 7:13-18

I am totally and completely convinced that Romans 7:13-24 is unequalled in its ability to produce spiritual victory in our lives and it is critical that we understand these verses very carefully. This text is one of the most controversial texts in the entire book of Romans.

The big controversy is this: Is Paul describing himself when he was spiritually unsaved? Is Paul describing himself when he had a struggle with fleshly carnality? Is Paul describing himself at a time when he came under conviction? Is Paul describing himself as a very spiritual and mature believer?

Those who believe Paul is describing an unsaved man do so on the basis that he says “he is sold into bondage to sin” (v. 14), that “nothing good dwells in me” (v. 18), and finally says “wretched man that I am” (v. 24). However, the biggest grammatical argument against this is that in verses 7-13 the verbs are aorist and in verses 14-24 the verbs are present tense, describing Paul’s present, continuous experience.

Those who believe Paul is describing a carnal Christian, who is dominated by the flesh, do so on the basis of the argument, that what we see here in this context is nothing but a defeated Christian who talks about his flesh problem (vv. 14, 18). However, if the context is carefully studied it is clear, that according to verse 25, Paul learns where victory is found - in one’s life through Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit (Romans 8).

Those who believe Paul is describing a man under conviction do so on the basis of the fact that Paul does not seem to describe one lost or one saved, but one in a state of conviction. The real problem with this is that one is either lost or saved. Again, Paul uses present tense verbs which indicate this is a continual situation, not a temporary moment of conviction.

We are far better to assume that Paul is writing these things and a very mature and spiritually-minded apostle. This was the conviction of Augustine, Luther, Calvin and most of the serious Bible interpreters. Paul is describing the struggle of the Christian life and he will show where victory is found.

Now there is nothing easy about victory in the Christian life; it is a struggle. You will not be able to go to some weekend seminar and come out victorious. You will not be able to have some peak spiritual experience and defeat your flesh. You must be a spiritual realist like Paul. You must be able to spot sin, and one thing you must know if you are to have victory, is that you will not get it from the O.T. Law. The one thing you must understand is this:

**THE LAW OF GOD IS NOT DESIGNED TO MAKE ONE SPIRITUAL , IT IS DESIGNED TO SHOW ONE IS SINFUL AND, THEREFORE, ONE WHO TRIES TO BE SPIRITUAL BY KEEPING THE LAW WILL BE ABSOLUTELY MISERABLE .**

Regardless of the controversy, we must keep our eye fixed on Paul's primary point, which is spirituality will not ever come by a focus on the Mosaic Law.

As we come to **verse 13**, Douglas Moo made an interesting observation - namely Paul does not really say anything new here which he has not already alluded to in the previous verses. This does show us how intent Paul was in having us understand the real purpose and premise behind the O.T. Law.

**Now the problem of our sinfulness cannot ever be blamed on the Law of God.** The Law of God is as good and as holy and as just as God. The problem of sinfulness is our own . problem; the Law of God just winds up showing us how sinful we really are.

Now this is a very difficult grammatical series of verses which contain many connecting conjunctions translated “ for ” (**vv. 14, 15, 18**) and “ but ” (**v. 16**). As near as I can determine, this series is designed to reason, explain, illustrate and contrast the main thesis - **You cannot become spiritual by keeping the Law .**

**Verse 13** begins with a question - namely, is God's good Law responsible for us being spiritually dead before God? Is it the Law of God that causes me to be spiritually dead and therefore leads me to eternal death? Paul's answer is, “May it never be!” The Law, which is good, showed us that we were dead in sin and showed us that our problem is, we are exceedingly sinful . The more we look accurately and honestly at the Law, the more we should see that we are spiritually dead and totally sinful . This is why a dead . spirituality will always exist for one focused on the Law . **The Law does not show a man he is spiritual , it shows a man he is sinful ; therefore, one focused on the Law is one focused on death.**

**EXPLANATORY POINT #1** – The law is spiritual but it shows us that we are enslaved to sin . **7:14**

William R. Newell said, “This is slave-market talk: and it describes all of us by nature. Instead of being spiritual and therefore able to harken to, delight in and obey God's holy, spiritual Law, we are turned back, since Adam sinned, to a fleshly condition, our spirits by nature dead to God, and our soul-faculties under the domination of the still unredeemed body” (*Romans*, p. 292).

Paul is talking about a mature believer here. A new convert does not know this. A new convert or an immature believer knows that his sins are forgiven and that he is justified by faith and is joyful about that. But the new convert does not know that there is an evil nature that will soon raise its ugly sinful head and will rebel against God and pursue its own path.

The more spiritually minded we become, the more we will realize the goodness and holiness of God and the worthlessness of ourselves . We will more and more realize our need to depend on God's grace and less and less depend on our works or attempts at keeping the Law.

**EXPLANATORY POINT #2** – The law shows us that we cannot do what we would like to do. **7:15**

In fact, the Law winds up showing us that we have such a sin problem that we actually do the things we hate to do. Thomas Robinson, a Biblical scholar from the University of Edinburgh in the 1800s says the Law keeps us aiming at holiness but shows us we cannot attain it.

I want to point out the verb, “I do.” This is a key verb of this section. It appears in four verses - **15, 17**, 19, and 20. The Greek verb (κατεργάζομαι) is one that literally means to achieve through labor (G Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 240). In this context it means to attempt to achieve through labor the works of the Law.

Paul is saying that he kept trying, by his own works, to keep the perfect Law of God and couldn't understand why he could not do it. He wanted so desperately to have victory over sin, but he kept losing and doing the very thing he hated. This was a major theological concession for Paul because at one time he thought he could keep the Law blamelessly before God (Philippians 3:6, 9).

**One main difference between a spiritual Christian and a carnal Christian is that the carnal Christian loves his sin and the spiritual Christian hates it.**

This verse combats two extreme faulty notions:

1. The possibility of sinless perfectionism.
2. The promotion of sinful antinomianism.

**EXPLANATORY POINT #3** – The Law shows us that it is good because we want to keep it but cannot. **7:16**

By virtue of the fact that we desire to keep God's Law, we demonstrate that the Law is the good standard and the problem is with us. When we end up doing what we don't want to do, we acknowledge that the Law is a good standard and we do not meet it.

Let us see if we can illustrate the point with a couple of illustrations from the famous Ten Commandments. **Commandment #5** says, “Honor your Father and Mother.” Paul will later say in this very book of Romans that we are to give respect and honor to those to whom it is due (Romans 13:7), and certainly this is true pertaining to our Father and Mother. But did you know, or are you willing to admit, that your initial rebellion against any authority started in your home when you were a boy or girl? Will you be honest enough to say - there were times in my home when I was rude, disrespectful, disobedient and ungrateful toward my own father and mother? The problem isn't with the Law; the Law is good, it was with us; we aren't good. **Commandment #9** - “You shall not bear false witness.” If there has ever been a time when you verbally discussed an unproved rumor about someone or deliberately exaggerated or distorted the truth or criticized or gossiped in an unfair way, then this Law has been broken. Will you be honest enough to admit that there have been times in your life when you have broken this Law? The problem is not with the Law; it is good, the problem is with us; we aren't good.

**EXPLANATORY POINT #4** – The law shows that there is a sin problem indwelling every one of us. **7:17**

We may notice that the word “indwell” is one which shows up in **verses 17, 18** and 20. It is a word that means two natures continually live inside a person. One nature moves toward godliness and the other moves toward godlessness.

Now when Paul writes **verse 17**, he emphasizes his new nature in Christ. The pronoun “I” refers to the fact that he is a new creation in Christ. The noun “sin” refers to the fact that he is a new creation in Christ. The noun “sin” refers to the sin nature which continues to plague his new nature in Christ.

The reason for the struggle is that Paul, with a new nature in Christ, honestly desires to do the will of God. But he has honestly discovered that there is a part to him, a sin nature, that will not permit him to do it.

Even when we blow it as a believer, by virtue of the fact that we didn’t want to blow it, we make a wonderful discovery, namely we have a new nature that does want to do what is right.

We do see from this verse that God completely makes us new when we believe on Christ. We are no longer the same person, but we still do have the same old nature.

**EXPLANATORY POINT #5** – The Law shows that there is a no good principle indwelling every one of us. **7:18**

In **verse 17**, the more positive perspective is that sin positively does indwell the old man. Now in this verse, he takes the negative approach - that no good does indwell the old man.

Dr. William R. Newell, the great Bible teacher, said he knew of hundreds of people who were challenged by well-meaning ministers to surrender to Christ as if they themselves had the power to do this. He said these people apparently do not understand the words of Paul who makes it very clear that in and of ourselves we do not have the power to do what we even want to do. Our old nature prevents it. No good thing lies in every one of us.

Any serious student of the Bible eventually comes to terms with the fact that “salvation is of the Lord.” It is not within the will of man to be able to do well in the sight of God. It is God who doeth the work and works in the individual (i.e. Philippians 2:12-13). It is God who gives us any ability to work out our salvation in a way that glorifies Him.

If we look to keeping the Law for our spirituality, we are looking in the wrong place. The Law will never make us spiritual, because we, in and of ourselves, cannot be spiritual. To live our life under the Law is to live in a way that will leave us absolutely miserable.