

A Cry for Deliverance

One of the great battles in this life is our battle with sin. At salvation we were set free from the penalty of sin and yet in this life a war with sin continues. How are we to think about this battle? Are we just weak and immature? Are we not committed enough? Today, we are looking at Romans 7:14-25 where Paul lays out his own battle with sin. This passage is hotly debated. Is Paul describing his own experience? And if this is his own experience, is this his experience as an unbeliever or as a believer? Or is he using a literary technique in which he uses the first person singular ("I") to depict the experience of Israel under the Law? Good, Bible-believing folks land in all these places, but we are going to approach this passage from the perspective that this is Paul writing about his own experience as a mature believer.

Opening Discussion: What interpretive approach have you had for this passage in the past?

Read Romans 7:14-25

1. Paul depicts two competing natures at war within himself in this passage. How would you describe these two natures?
2. In what sense could Paul as a Christian write that he is "of flesh, sold into bondage to sin" (v. 14)?
3. What is "the flesh" (v. 14, 18, 25)?
4. Paul makes the statement that "evil is present in me" (v. 21). How do you understand this? How is it possible that evil dwells in a believer?
5. What kind of longing for doing God's will do you see in Paul's life in this passage?

6. In what ways do you identify with Paul's struggle?
7. If Paul, as a mature believer, is describing such struggle with sin, how does this affect how you think about the nature of sin?
8. Ultimately, what is our hope for deliverance from this war with sin?

Steve said:

Are there sins that, quite honestly, you love? Augustine said that if you really want to know someone, don't ask "What do you believe?" Rather, ask, "What do you love?" And so I would ask you whether or not there are sins that you love? When I've found myself loving some sin, I've found great benefit in simply admitting as much to God. Since everything is laid bare before God's eyes, there's no reason to hide and pretend in His presence. Admit if there is some sin that you need to begin hating and some aspect of His will that you need to begin loving.

9. What do you think about this idea of admitting to God that you simply do love some sin? How might that help?

Steve said:

Paul's experience suggests that we cultivate a hatred for (our own) sin and a love for the will of God. It's relatively easy to identify and hate other people's sins. Actually it's too easy. But I'm struck by Paul's statement that he hated his own sins (7:15 "I am doing the very thing I hate."). And I'm also struck by his statement that he loved the will of God (7:22 "I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man."). If we understand that these are the statements of a mature believer, it seems to me that we need to cultivate this same mind toward both sin and the will of God.

10. How can we cultivate a hatred of our own sin and a love for the will of God?
11. What is the main thing that you sense God might be saying to you from this passage?

Notes on the Interpretive Approach:

In Bob Utley's, *The Gospel according to Paul: Romans*, Study Guide Commentary Series, he presents the following textual evidence dealing with the question, "Is Paul referring to a saved or unsaved person in vv. 14–25?":

1. Unsaved person

- a. This was the interpretation of the early Greek speaking church Fathers
- b. The following phrases support this view
 - (1) "I am of flesh," v. 14
 - (2) "sold into bondage to sin," v. 14
 - (3) "nothing good dwells in me," v. 18
 - (4) "making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members," v. 23
 - (5) "wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?" v. 24
- c. The immediate context of chapter 6 is that we are free from the mastery of sin. The context of chap. 8 starts with "so then."
- d. The absence of any reference to the Spirit or Christ until the close of this context (v. 25).

2. Saved person

- a. This was the interpretation of Augustine, Calvin, and the Reformed tradition
- b. The following phrases support this view
 - (1) "we know that the Law is spiritual," v. 14
 - (2) "I agree with the Law, confessing that it is good," v. 16
 - (3) "the good that I wish, I do not do ...," v. 19
 - (4) "I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man," v. 22
- c. The larger context of Romans places chapter 7 in the section dealing with sanctification.
- d. The obvious change of verb tenses from IMPERFECT and AORISTS in vv. 7–13 to the consistent use of the PRESENT tense in vv. 14–24 imply a different and new section of Paul's life (i.e. conversion).