

Lesson 18: The Weakness of Law II

Romans 7:13-25

Objection

¹³ Therefore did that which is good become *a cause of* death for me?

Short answer

May it never be!

Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.

Long answer

Cycle 1: A. I am of sinful flesh. B. I desire good. C. I do evil. D. Not I, but sin does it.

¹⁴ For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. ¹⁵ For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I *would* like to *do*, but I am doing the very thing I hate. ¹⁶ But if I do the very thing I do not want to *do*, I agree with the Law, *confessing* that the Law is good. ¹⁷ So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

Cycle 2: A. I am of sinful flesh. B. I desire good. C. I do evil. D. Not I, but sin does it.

¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good *is* not. ¹⁹ For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. ²⁰ But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

Cycle 3: A. I am of sinful flesh. B. I desire good. C. I do evil. D. Not I, but sin does it.

²¹ I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. ²² For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, ²³ but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.

²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.

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Introduction

In Romans 7:13-25, Paul masterfully describes the inner struggle of the conscious and particularly the weakness of the will to do the good he knows he should do. Scholars through the ages have argued back and forth whether Paul is describing here a Christian experience or a non-Christian experience. I have preached it both ways. I changed my mind about what Paul is doing in this passage.

In interpretation, context is king. In this passage arguments in the text exist for interpreting it as a Christian experience or as a non-Christian experience. The mistake we do not want to make is the mistake of interpreting the text based on our own personal experience. We don't want to say, "I felt this as a Christian therefore I know this is a Christian experience." Or, "I felt this as a non-Christian therefore I know this is a non-Christian experience." That is importing our own experience into the text as a basis for interpretation. We also don't want to assume an interpretation based on our theological system. "Christian's don't struggle like this, so this cannot be a Christian experience." How do we know Christian's don't struggle like this? If Paul is teaching that this is a Christian experience, then that's how we have to take it.

Paul gives us the means for interpreting the passage by paying close attention to the context. He has repeatedly used the same rhetorical pattern by putting forth an objection, giving a short answer to the objection and then giving a longer answer for why he rejects the objection. We have the same pattern here. So, our interpretation starts with understanding the objection. And then determining how this passage serves as an answer to that objection.

Objection

This passage does not start with an invitation, a “What then?” It moves directly into the objection question. “Therefore did that which is good become *a cause of death* for me?” Paul previously stated in 7:5 that the law arouses sinful passions and produces fruit for death. This negative take on the law motivated two objections. The first objection, “Is the Law sin?”, we addressed in our last lesson in 7:7-12. Paul said that it is not. The flaw is not in the law but in human nature. Paul concluded that the Law is holy and good. This current objection takes his remark that the Law produces fruit for death and suggests that Paul, though calling the Law good, is making the Law out to be the cause of death. Paul has a short answer for that claim.

Short answer

“May it never be!”

As he did back in 6:2, Paul elaborates a little on his short answer before moving into the long answer. He writes, “May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.”

Sin is the culprit. This is consistent with 5:12, “through one man sin entered into the word and death through sin, and so death spread to all men.” The sinful impulses of human nature effect our death when confronted by moral law. This will happen with or without a specifically revealed covenant of law to live by. But without clear moral obligation, we can live in a state of self-denial regarding our own nature. The fuzzier our moral vision the more likely we are to convince ourselves and to claim to be basically good. Faced with a higher, clearly defined law to follow the sin in us becomes utterly sinful. The people of Israel, through the whole 1500 year period from Moses to Jesus, teach humanity that no social moral agenda will produce righteous people. God told them ahead of time through Moses that they would break his covenant and bring the full extent of curses on themselves, even to the point of banishment from the land, that’s Deuteronomy chapters 30 and 31 (Deuteronomy 30:1-6; 30:19-20; 31:14-22). Generation after generation the curse of sin worked in the lives even of those who believed. Given the best possible opportunity to live according to a covenant of law, human beings cannot do it. Believing Israelites were saved by grace yet continued the struggle to live for God. When a person attempts to live the Law from the inside out, their sin within is shown to themselves to be utterly sinful.

Paul’s long answer does not focus on the theological perspective of Israel under Mosaic Law. We are not speaking theoretically here. And we are not looking at the experience of a whole community. As he did in our previous passage, Paul takes us inside a human being to the inner struggle of individual experience.

Long answer

Just as with all our previous long answers, this long answer begins with a sentence using the verb “know”. Paul changes it up slightly. In the first three long answers he used the second person plural “you know,” in the previous long answer he used first person singular “I know,” and in this long answer he uses the third person plural “we know” but then shifts back to the first person singular “I”. The long answer starts, “For we know that the Law is spiritual; but I am of the flesh...”

The structure of the long answer in 7:14-25 repeats four truths over again in three cycles. Let’s walk through the text first and then we will come back to the question about whose experience Paul is describing, the Christian or non-Christian. The four truths repeated three times are these.

A. I am of sinful flesh. B. I desire good. C. I do evil. D. Not I, but sin does it.

By cycling through these four truths three times Paul builds up the experience of frustration. It’s a cycle that cannot be broken. You get the feeling of being stuck. Being powerless. I am going to read it quickly with that frustration in mind.

[Read Romans 7:14-25]

The three cycles occur in 14-17, 18-20 and 21-23. With a double conclusion in 24-25. The four truths come out rather clearly. First, I am of sinful flesh. Paul says it these three ways in the three cycles. (A) "I am of the flesh, sold into bondage to sin."; "I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh."; and "I find then the principle that evil is present in me."

This first truth comes out of Paul's recognition of the next two truths. He knows he is of sinful flesh because he desires good yet does evil. This is how he describes his desire for good. (B) "If I do the very thing I do not wish to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that it is good."; "the wishing of good is present in me...the good that I wish, I do not do."; and "I joyfully concur with the Law of God in the inner man." Though he recognizes what is good and desires to do good, Paul confesses his inability to do good and his inevitable doing of evil. This is how he describes his actions. (C) "That which I am doing I do not understand for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate."; "The doing of good is not present in me...but I practice the very evil that I do not wish."; and "I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members."

Paul recognizes a fourth truth. He says he wants to do good. He confesses he does not. This led him to the conclusion that he is of sinful flesh. But while acknowledging the sinfulness of his own flesh, he also personifies sin and blames sin. This is how he describes sin. (D) "So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which indwells me."; "I am no longer the one doing it but sin which dwells in me." And "I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members."

These are the four truths of his individual experience. When attempting to fulfill the Law this is what he sees in himself.

A. I am of sinful flesh. B. I desire good. C. I do evil. D. Not I, but sin does it.

Whose experience is this?

Under what circumstances does this person feel this way? Whose experience does this describe? The easy answer is, "Paul's. It describes Paul's experience." I agree. I think it describes Paul's experience, while also describing Everyman's experience. It describes your experience and it describes my experience. That's why we readily connect to this passage.

We still have to determine what the circumstances of this experience are. Is this the experience of the Christian or the non-Christian? And we are using those terms in the way Paul would use them. We are not thinking of a nominal or cultural Christian. So, to rephrase, we could ask whether this is the experience of one who has been made alive in Christ or one who has not been made alive in Christ? In his commentary on Romans, Douglas Moo (*NICNT: The Epistle to the Romans*, 445.) provides solid lists for both sides. Here is a summary of his lists, five points for each.

We could make this argument to say that Paul is speaking of one already made alive in Christ.

1. The pronoun "I" must refer to Paul himself, and the shift from the past tenses of 7:7-13 to the present tenses of 7:14-25 can be explained only if Paul is describing his present experience.
2. Only the regenerate "delight in God's law" (7:22), seek to obey it (7:15-20), and "serve" it (7:25); the unregenerate do not "seek after God" (3:11) and cannot "submit to the law of God" (8:7).
3. Whereas the "mind" of people outside of Christ is presented by Paul as opposed to God (1:28), the "mind" of the person in this text is a positive medium, by which the person "serves the Law of God."
4. The person must be a Christian because only a Christian possesses the "inner person" as used in 2 Cor. 4:16 and Eph. 3:16.

5. The passage concludes, after Paul's mention of deliverance wrought by God in Christ, with a reiteration of the divided state of the person (7:24-25).

Or, we could make this argument to say that Paul is speaking of one who is not alive in Christ.

1. The connection of the person with the flesh points back to 7:5.
2. The person throughout this passage struggles "on his/her own" (7:25) without the aid of the Holy Spirit.
3. The person is "under the power of sin" (7:14), a state from which every believer is released (6:2, 6, 11, 18-22).
4. As the unsuccessful struggle of 7:15-20 shows, the person is a "prisoner of the law of sin" (7:23). Yet, 8:2 proclaims that believers have been set free from this same "law of sin (and death)."
5. While Paul makes clear that believers will continue to struggle with sin (6:12-13; 13:12-14), what is depicted in 7:14-25 is not just a struggle with sin but a defeat by sin.

If you would like a copy of that list, you can get it in the notes on the resource page at observetheword.com. I am not going to take the time to go through the argument point by point. I will give you my opinion though. I do not like the framing of the question as Christian or non-Christian. If pressed, I would say non-Christian, meaning one not yet made alive in Jesus Christ.

In my very first lesson in this series on Romans, I mentioned that my study of Romans began after a debate with my brother Charlie about an issue in Romans. This was the passage, and this was the issue. I don't remember which side I took. And I don't remember which side he took. I remember having the realization that we could each make a pretty good list from the text like the two lists above. But evaluation of the lists needed to happen with an understanding of Paul's argument in chapter 7 but then also in chapters 5-8 but then also the argument of 1-11. Understanding the whole argument gives us the context of this particular passage. I think I have an understanding of the larger argument and the place of this passage in that argument.

The argument of Romans 1-11 is that the righteousness of God has been accomplished through the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is our big picture argument. In 1-4, we were shown that God reveals himself righteous by making a way to declare his followers righteous through grace received by faith. Paul continued in 5-8 to argue that God did not only want forgiven followers but transformed followers. He wants followers who are not just declared righteous but who begin to live righteously. In chapters 6 and 7, Paul is showing that grace is the plan for producing transformed believers who live righteously. Under law, believers are inevitably handicapped by their own sinful flesh. Even with the desire to live for God, we cannot do it. In this immediate passage, the charge is that the law is a cause of death. Paul answers, showing us these two things. (1) Sin is the cause of death. (2) No matter what our understanding or desire for the Law may be, we do not have the ability to live it out. Paul is writing about the experience of the internal struggle of one under law because that is what this argument is about.

I do want to mention a couple of the points in the lists above. I do not find a problem with Paul speaking in first person present to describe a general experience of one under law. I think Paul is using this as a literary choice as a preacher might do, entering first person to explain a past event in a way that draws his listeners into the experience.

I do find the argument that a non-believer cannot delight in the law of God to be one of the strongest reasons to see this experience as a Christian experience because Paul says in 8:7 that the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God and does not submit to God. But I believe it is a bit more complicated than that. There are a number of times in the Psalms where David says things like, "I delight to do Your will, O my God; Your Law is within my heart (Psalm 40:8)." That gives Paul justification for describing a person under law who can delight in the Law of God, yet not overcome the sin nature of the flesh."

I also find the language of this person as a “sold into bondage to sin” directly contrary to Paul’s argument for grace in chapter 6. By grace we are “no longer to be slaves to sin”, commanded to not let sin “reign in our mortal body”, and told that “sin shall not be master over you.” Yet, this person claims he is unable to present the members of his body to God because he is “a prisoner of the law of sin which is in his members.”

Paul describes in this passage the person under the law. In doing so, he highlights the power of sin and the weakness of the law to effect change in the inner person.

The Person Under the Law

Still thinking about whose experience this is, we can say that all people live to some degree under law, even if it is only a law of their own making. To some degree everyone experiences something like this. Christian, non-Christian, Muslim, Jew, Atheist. We explode in anger or give way in lust, and we don’t like it. We tell ourselves that is not us. We don’t want to behave that way. We will do better next time. Maybe we have some success, but eventually we do the same exact thing we said we were no longer going to do. And in that, this is a universal experience.

But the intense internal awareness shown in this experience is not common to all. And the continual bondage to sin is not true of believers who are growing in grace. Let’s consider several examples of people living under law and then end with the example of a person growing in grace. We’ll start with the self-righteous legalist.

Self-righteous Legalist – Older Brother

The self-righteous legalist may not possess clear inner awareness of his moral failings. He would say he “delights” in the law of God because he knows that is the spiritual way to say it, though in truth he delights in an external version of the law that provides him a sense of inner worth and outward status. He feels successful in his obedience and superior to the disobedient.

Jesus’ story of the two sons in Luke 15:11-32 gives us an example of the self-righteous legalist. It’s not the younger son who goes off to live as he wants to live. Pastor Tim Keller does a great job showing how both sons live according to the law. The younger son according to a law that says you have to follow your heart and the older son a law that says you have to stay home. Search Tim Keller, [The Prodigal Sons](#), to listen to a great sermon on that. The primary target of Jesus’ parable happens to be the self-righteous legalist, the pharisee, it is the older brother.

The older son stays home and accepts all the moral obligation of a son. Yet, at the end of the story, the older son finds himself bitter, standing outside, refusing to join the celebration. He dishonors the Father. The Father has to come out to him. The older son has appeared to obey the moral obligation of a son but that obedience is not motivated by love for the Father. The older son is jealous of the calf, the ring, the robe given to the younger because the older son sees those things as his right. He has been obedient not out of love but out of gain. The Father owes him for his obedience. He feels the right to make demands on the Father. Though he stayed home in obedience, his heart was far from the heart of the Father.

As a self-righteous legalist, he believed that he had succeeded in conforming to the law without ever addressing the issues of the heart. He never cried out as Paul did, “Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?” The Father was the problem. The younger brother was the problem. He never came to the realization of his true state. In the parable he is left standing outside the house, excluded by choice from the celebration.

So, though Paul’s description applies to a person under the Law, I think we have to conclude it does not apply to every person under the Law. It is possible to be self-deluded as a law keeper that we are doing just fine.

Sadly, many who call themselves Christians will identify more with the older brother than with Paul’s experience in Romans 7. They are first question legalists, who believe that Christian law makes them

acceptable to God. They do not depend on the grace of God for their salvation. For them it is faith plus the doing of the Law. And they are going to be left outside the wedding feast.

Tortured Legalist – Martin Luther

There is another kind of first question legalist who believes that the Christian law is the means of salvation and yet is aware of his or her inability to live up to that law. He is not a self-righteous legalist. He is a tortured legalist. He has a high awareness of the requirements of the law and of his inability to live out the law. But he has no understanding of grace. The young monk Martin Luther was a classic example of the tortured legalist.

Martin Luther paid close attention to the system of penance he was required to follow. He understood the Church's teaching that confession was not valid if the one confessing did so only to gain the reward of heaven. Confession was only valid if it was motivated from the heart by love of God. That idea nearly drove Martin Luther mad. He realized outward obedience did not fulfill the law of the Church, unless his inner motivation was love for God. It would be hard to find a young monk who did a better job of outwardly obeying Church law. Yet famously, he once spent six hours in confession with the vicar of his order Johann von Staupitz, confessing the insincerity of his confession. Luther wrote, "I was myself more than once driven to the very abyss of despair so that I wished I had never been created. Love God? I hated him!"

As a tortured legalist, Martin Luther could have agreed with Paul's description of life under the law. He could have cried out, "Wretched man that I am, who will set me free from the body of this death?" But he did not know the answer.

Concerned about young Luther, Dr. Staupitz made an interesting move. He assigned Luther to the post of Bible teacher at Wittenberg University. Required to teach the *Letter to the Romans*, Luther mulled over the meaning of Paul's argument, paying particular consideration to the thesis in Romans 1:17. Luther later wrote about the moment when God opened his eyes to the gospel.

"Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection of the righteousness of God and the statement that 'the righteous will live by faith.' Then I grasped that the righteousness of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise...If you have a true faith that Christ is your Savior, then at once you have a gracious God, for faith leads you in and opens up God's heart and will, that you should see pure grace and overflowing love. (Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand, A Life of Martin Luther*, 49-50)."

Now Luther could at last finish Paul's statement, crying out not only, "What a wretched man I am."; but also adding, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

Second question Legalist – King David.

Not all legalists are first question legalists. Perhaps King David would identify closely with this experience Paul has described, but I would call David a second question legalist. He knew that the first question of covenant, "What makes me acceptable?" was 100% grace. But he would have rightly answered the second question of covenant, "How then should I live?" by pointing to Mosaic Law. In Psalm 119, he refers to his delight in the Law of God over and over. He says things like, "Make me walk in the path of your commandments for I delight in it (119:35)." In his mind, David loved the Law of God. In his life, he struggled to live according to the Law of God.

Paul's concluding two verses in 7:24-25 fit David well, with one exception. I can easily imagine David writing in the Psalms, "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin."

The one exception is that David could not yet have cried out, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" It was his lot in life to be born under the Mosaic Covenant. With all the blessing that

provided, like the prophets of old, he could only yearn for the coming day of Jesus Christ. He could not experience the fruit of spiritual union with Christ that comes through the covenant of Grace.

The Christian Legalist

The experience that Paul has described can apply to Christians both as first question legalists and as second question legalists. Martin Luther's earlier life is an example of a person who calls himself a Christian but comes from a tradition or a personal understanding of Christianity that essentially rejects the gospel of grace.

Paul's experience can also apply true Christians who have placed their faith in Jesus and, having been born again, enjoy union with Jesus. Like David they know that they are accepted 100% by grace, but also like David they believe that the second question is answered in following a covenant of law. They are living out the new covenant as though it is the old wineskin of law.

This is not an unusual path for a true believer in Jesus. In fact, I believe this is the most natural course for people to take when starting out in Christian faith because we are naturally legalists at heart. Even though God tells us we are completely accepted by his grace because of his love, we still feel inside the need to prove ourselves. We feel valuable because of our success. We feel loveable because we do what is right. When we fail, we feel unlovable, we feel unworthy, we feel bad about ourselves and our relationship with God. We feel this way because at heart we define our worth and lovability on the basis of works we do, not the grace we have received. This is the natural direction of our fallen nature. In conjunction with that, the natural direction of our fallen nature is also to try to be obedient in our own power, out of the strength of our human flesh. Fallen nature misses these two truths of grace: our worth is in Christ and our strength is in Christ.

The way of grace must be learned. We need to be disciplined into it. We need it taught. We need it modeled. We need to see it lived out.

Unfortunately, we often create communities of Christian law. Many churches and movements that do well preaching grace to non-believers, bringing them to the cross, after the cross, communicate to believers a way of Christian law. This can be taught strongly, or it can be taught by omission. If we only hear what we are supposed to be doing and not doing, then our hearts will naturally pick up on the law. We also need to hear the teaching of grace. We need to hear who we are in Jesus. We need to hear of our security in him and his love for us. We need to hear about our new union, our new hope, our new heart, our new power. We need to hear about grace, so that we can put the commands of the new covenant into the right context.

Is it possible for Romans 7 to describe the experience of a true Christian? Yes. Though, if this experience is the defining, ongoing experience of a believer, as a slave to sin unable to do good, I would say he or she is not growing in understanding of the covenant of grace. The Christian who lives like this is a Christian under a covenant of law, even if it's Christian law.

The Person Growing in Grace

Let's conclude, considering the experience of the believer growing in Grace. Here is an important distinction. I do not believe that Paul is describing the normal, ongoing experience of a Christian who is growing in grace. I do believe that all Christians growing in grace have this experience at times as they grow. The norm for Christians growing in grace should not be one of consistent failure described as bondage to sin. Grace brings about victory in the struggle, not absolute victory in the struggle. At least not yet in this life. We will all fail. But we will also experience victory and a growing peace even in the struggle.

If you are walking with Christ in grace, then yours is not the experience of the tortured legalist. You will still grow, still suffer, still struggle. That is going to bear out in chapter 8. But you will not be defined by your slavery to sin as Paul defines the experience here. Romans 8:2, "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death."

If you believe you are walking with Christ in grace, and yet also define your ongoing experience as Paul describes here, you should share your experience with a mature believer you know who seems to walk with the peace and joy of Christ. Learning to walk in grace is very much a learning process. We often make the mistake of starting out at a run, not realizing we are running the way of law. Often, we need to start over. We need to learn to sit up and then to crawl. This might come easily. But to stand and walk requires encouragement, instruction, and a helping hand. Running and jumping comes after walking. It's a process of growth in grace. It does not preclude stumbling or tiring out or falling back into our old stride. And there are also always future challenges. Walking by grace as a single person is different than walking by grace as a married person which is different than walking by grace as a parent. Walking by grace as a student is different than walking by grace as a working person which is different than walking by grace as a manager. Walking by grace in your 20s is different than walking by grace in your 40s which is different than walking by grace in your 60s. Life keeps bringing new races to run, new paths to walk, new challenges for trust, and new needs for the fruit of the Spirit.

There are other special reasons why the walk of grace may be a struggle for you. Reasons that go deeper than just the natural process of spiritual growth and the changes of life circumstances. Our sinful desires and habits are developed and affected by a variety of issues that can include emotional woundedness, genetic disposition, chemical imbalance, spiritual oppression and addiction. It is possible that your struggle has complicated causes. A relationship of grace with Jesus is the solution. Still, we all need help getting there. Because of these potential complications, it really is necessary to find an older believer you can trust and to find a small group community you can be part of. We grow in grace in community with members of the body of Christ.

The Personification of sin – who is responsible?

Let's close with one of the outstanding aspects of Paul's description here in Romans 7. I think Paul is giving us mental health at its best. I was once told that if we could release people from their deep sense of guilt, we could free 50% of the people currently in mental institutions.

Freedom from guilt does not come from denial of guilt. This is part of the mental problem. Western mental health teaches us to deny guilt and to deny responsibility. Yet, as moral creatures we know we are guilty and responsible. We may shove it aside for a time, but the inner voice can't let go.

Out of context, we could read Paul's personification of sin as supporting a victim mentality that rejects blame. Take verse 17, "So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which indwells me." Is that what Paul is doing? Is he shifting blame away from me the person.

No. He is not. Honestly opening our heart and our soul up to the requirements of law is like holding our inner self up to a mirror. When we see ourselves as we are, we come away crying with Paul, "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?" Mental and emotional healing starts with an honest assessment of our spiritual state. It starts with saying, "I cannot live up to this. I have not lived up to this. I have sinned. I cannot stop sinning." That's not victim mentality. That is honestly facing up to the reality of your fallen human nature.

The "I" in Paul's description takes personal responsibility. "I" do these things. "I" am wretched. "I" am guilty. "I" do evil. That is personal responsibility.

With that personal responsibility comes this interesting truth that "I" am not sin. It opens the door to hope. This is what we get from the tension Paul creates by identifying the center of sin in my own flesh, but then also repeating this idea, "I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me." Sin is somehow outside of what is essentially me. The essential me is not sin. Sin is in my flesh. Sin is a power in me for which I am responsible. Sin is not me. It is somehow other; not essential to my nature.

The vision for that truth is heaven. You will one day exist in a transformed state. The desires, urges, thoughts, power of sin will no longer be true of you as a human being. Sin may be natural to the

fallen human state, but it is not natural to God's conception of what it means to be whole as a human being. To be truly human is to be without sin. Our ultimate vision is still not yet. It comes in heaven.

But we have a vision of this life that is working toward that ideal. Sin is no longer your master if you are under the grace of Christ Jesus. The person of Romans 7 grasps his wretched state. He grasps that he cannot save himself. He needs help. He needs a savior from both the guilt of sin and from the power of sin. He cries out. "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to Jesus Christ our Lord!" Then he sums up again his human state under law. "So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other with my flesh the law of sin." But he is not going to stop there. Having recognized the weakness of the law and having seen the strength of grace, he is ready now to begin to walk in the newness of the Spirit and the assurance of the love of the Father in Jesus Christ.

Reflection Questions

1. What stands out to you as interesting or important or strange or confusing in Romans 7:13-25? What are some questions that the text raises for you?
2. What is the objection Paul has raised, and in your own words, summarize how the long answer responds to the objection?
3. Is it helpful to you to think of the personal experience described in this passage as the experience of a person under the Law. How is this a helpful way to describe this experience? Is it unhelpful or confusing to describe this as a person under the Law?
4. This experience can also describe the occasional experience of the Christian. Under what circumstances you would say that this experience describes a Christian experience?
5. How do you address this struggle in your own life of knowing what you ought to do, but not being able to consistently do what you ought to do?