

## **Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church**

(November 25, 2012)

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Sermon manuscript

### **Sermon Series: Romans – Jesus’ Gospel Sets You Free!**

#### **Out of Lament, Thanks!**

(Romans 7:13-25)

Study #12

#### **Introduction: The one thing Prison Fellowship can never do...**

This Christmas season, as in Christmas seasons over the past bunch of years, our church is participating in Project Angel Tree. Project Angel Tree is a ministry of visiting and befriending families of incarcerated men and women, while also sharing the good news of life in Christ.

Prison Fellowship is the ministry started by Chuck Colson after he spent time in prison for crimes committed during the Watergate scandal during the Nixon administration.

For a number of years Colson devoted the better part of his time and energies to ministry to jail inmates and prisoners incarcerated around the world.

One of the most articulate and brilliant men around, Colson worked on behalf of prisoners in this country and around the world.

He worked tirelessly for reform of jail conditions, for the establishment of restitution as the governing principle of the penal code, for support for the families of prisoners, and for the spiritual enrichment of those behind the concrete walls of the prisons.

Colson and the ministry he founded have been of incredible help to prisoners over the \_\_\_\_ years of its existence.

As feverishly as he worked on behalf of the inmates, though, the one thing Chuck Colson could never do was to release them. He did not have the authority to pull that one off. The inmates he visited remained incarcerated AFTER every visit.

As powerfully as Chuck Colson served prisoners during his life and as lovingly as Prison Fellowship continues to serve prisoners today, the one thing they can never do is release a prisoner. Only the state can do that. And only ONE has the power to release a sinner from sin’s bondage.

This morning, we are examining an imprisonment of a more insidious kind than that with which Chuck Colson has to deal - the spiritual kind.

And, will see a Deliverer who has the authority to set the prisoners free - and does so.

Now, you should know that there is plenty of healthy debate when it comes to the interpretation of the verses before us this morning.<sup>1</sup>

Various options have been offered by numerous commentators as to how what Paul wrote is to be understood.

And before we actually jump into the text today, I am going to mention some of the interpretive approaches that are used in coming to this passage.<sup>2</sup>

Many people believe that Paul is writing of his current experience as a believer, autobiographically, and that what he says here is to be considered normative for all believers. One commentator who holds this viewpoint writes, “*The cry of anguished frustration in Romans 7:7-24 is the life-long cry of the Christian.*” (Dunn)

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<sup>1</sup> In his commentary on the book of Romans, William Barclay remarks about the entire seventh chapter, “Seldom did Paul write so difficult and so complicated a passage as this.” Bible scholar C.H. Dodd agrees, saying that when reading this passage we should try to forget what Paul says and try to find out what he means.

<sup>2</sup> All of these positions taken, by the way, by good and godly people who are seriously committed to coming to the text to understand it as Paul meant to communicate it.

Others believe that Paul is writing of a sub-optimal Christian experience. Call it immature or carnal, it is corrected when the believer locates the key to spiritual victory, which is found in chapter 8.

Another group believes that Paul is writing rhetorically, rather than autobiographically. That is, he is speaking to the potential experience of all men and women, both believers and unbelievers. And what that means is that Paul is not giving a description of the normal Christian life, but of what follows for any person - regenerate or unregenerate - who relies on the law and on his own efforts for sanctification.<sup>3</sup>

And there are also those who believe that Paul is describing here the experience of someone who has never come to know Christ as Savior.

It is my hope, of course, that we will end up agreeing on the interpretation. Much more importantly, I hope - and I have prayed - that God will allow this passage to have its intended result, which is to draw all of us to reverent worship of our great God, and to trust in His Son, Jesus.

As Jeff made clear last Sunday in his excellent message out of Romans 6, Jesus bought us to set us free. Our obedience to Him is only right, given who we are - children of God who have received His grace. And our obedience to Him is only right given the damage that sin will bring.

Yes, sin is out to get us and sin is made manifest when we violate a law. But - and this is HUGE! - the Law of God is not bad.

No, the Law (or "law" generally) is a good thing because it brought sin, which was always lurking, to the surface and showed us that it (sin) needed to be dealt with.

Paul assures us, in fact, that *[12]...the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.*

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<sup>3</sup> In this case, the passage describes a man who is trying to be good and holy by his own efforts and is beaten back every time by the power of indwelling sin.

Now, following on the heels of the question he asked about the sinfulness of God's Law, a whole new section begins at verse 13, as he asks another question about the nature of the Law.

### **Lament: THIS Is What Internal Warfare Looks Like (vv. 13-14)**

#### **The Cause of Your Spiritual Death (v. 13-14a)**

*The Law is NOT the cause of your spiritual death (v. 13a)*

***[13a] Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be!***

Look carefully at this question. Paul isn't asking, "How can we define a Christian?" Nor is he asking, "What is Christian experience like?"

The question is, "Did the Law cause my spiritual death?" Granted that the Law is a good and righteous instrument of God, was it the cause of my death to God?

Paul answers here with a strong, definitive **NO WAY!** The Law certainly did not cause anyone's spiritual death.

So, how does spiritual death come about - for Paul or you or me? It is through sin.

*Utterly sinful sin caused your spiritual death (v. 13b)*

***[13b] Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.***<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Paul says that when the command comes to not "covet" we come to know sin in its fullness. It is certainly true that men do actually sin in the absence of the law. But, what Paul is saying, and what our experience validates is that we do not fully recognize sin for what it is, apart from the law. We do covet even before we know the tenth commandment. But, it is in the light of that commandment that we recognize our coveting for what it is - an affront to God, that which God forbids, a deliberate disobeying of God's revealed will.

Sin takes things that are good and turns them into destructive things.

- Sexual intimacy, a beautiful thing within the fireplace of a marriage between a man and a woman, is as destructive as a forest fire anywhere else. The beauty of sex can become an ugly tool used for manipulation, or a weapon of self-gratification at the expense of others.
- Power and authority, positions useful for bringing blessing to others, may be twisted into abuse and “lording it over” when sin is in charge.
- Material goods, necessary for getting along in life, can become objects of desire that control us.
- Under the dominion of sin, friendships, surely one of life’s greatest blessings, become grasping, clinging, tense pseudo-relationships.
- When sin holds sway, a legitimate longing for freedom turns into an ugly demand for independence and arrogance.

The deadliness of sin is seen in that it can take the best things and turn them into base and ugly things.

As Paul wrote earlier, *[8a]...sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind.*

Sin is malicious and opportunistic.

Then, piggy-backing on to that thought about the nature of Law, he makes one more observation about God’s Law.

*The nature of the Law (v. 14a)*

***[14a] For we know that the Law is spiritual***

It is spiritual because it comes from the hand of the God who is Spirit. It is spiritual because it works on the spiritual aspect of man, not the physical.

The Law gave physical commands to follow, but it is our spirits that direct our steps and determine the path we will follow.

So, the Law is not sinful; it didn’t cause my separation from God or my spiritual death; it is spiritual.

BUT, the Law surfaced my sinfulness, and, as Paul has already said, *[6:23] The wages of sin is death.*

Now Paul turns to a discussion of his own life to show what happens to a human soul when sin effects death. He speaks autobiographically, using the first person singular, “**I**”, in the second part of verse 14.

### **The Result of Your Spiritual Death (v. 14b)**

*[14b] but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.*

Interesting way for an apostle to speak of himself, isn’t it? So, first let’s look at the vocabulary Paul uses. He says, “**I am of flesh.**”

*The vocabulary Paul uses*

“Of flesh” (his identity)

Remember that back in Romans 7:5, Paul used the term, “**flesh**” to refer to the controlling principle of sin and rebellion against God.

In describing himself here, the “**I**” is comprised of “**flesh.**” It is Paul’s identity. To be “**in the flesh**” is to be without a relationship with God.

Ill: something that is someone’s identity...

Athlete:

Student:

American:

Republican/Democrat:

Etc..

Before Christ: sinner

After Christ: saint

Here, Paul says that he is “of flesh” - exactly the way he would describe himself if he was talking about his life before Jesus.

Fueling that viewpoint is another comment Paul makes about himself in the same verse. He says that he is **“sold into bondage to sin.”**

“sold into bondage to sin”

Those words call to mind statements in Romans that Paul has already made about slavery to sin.

***[6:6] knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, that we would no longer be slaves to sin.***

***[6:17] But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed***

***[6:19b]...For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.***

***[6:20] For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.***

These verses all speak of the reality that, prior to becoming a child of God, each of us is a slave to sin.

This statement at the end of verse 14 is a declaration of sin’s dominion in Paul’s life.

From what we’ve just seen, we might be leaning in the direction of saying that Paul is speaking about his experience as a non-believer.

But, in addition to noting his vocabulary, we also need to note that he uses the present tense in describing himself.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Grammatically, he begins to use the present tense to describe his own experience in the second part of verse 14, to align with the present tense of the phrase, **“the Law is spiritual.”**

That fact has led many people to believe that he is describing his present experience as a Christian. So, what does the use of the present tense - **“I AM of flesh”** - really prove?

*The tense Paul uses (present)*

Well, upon close examination - not much.

It seems to me that he wanted to convey a vividness and an intensity to his experience, which the present tense allows, but the past tense doesn’t.

If we are highly animated about a story we are telling, we are likely to tell it this way, **“OK, I’m going down the road, minding my own business, right? Out of nowhere comes this semi truck that nearly runs into me.”**

You understand that the incident happened in the past. I use the present tense, though, to add intensity to the story. I am of a mind that this is precisely what Paul is doing in Romans 7.

If it still seems odd that Paul used the present tense here - don’t feel alone.<sup>6</sup> By using the past tense, he would have certainly made interpretation much simpler.

But, I am still struck by the vocabulary he has used. It is so striking and so strong and so commonly used to describe someone who doesn’t know Jesus.

Paul looks at his lifestyle and actions and scratches his head. What is he so confused about? He tells us.

### **Lament: THIS Is What Bondage Looks Like (vv. 15-20)**

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<sup>6</sup> Several commentaries take the present tense as indicating that Paul is describing his current, Christian experience (John Murray in the New International Commentary on the New Testament, C.E.B Cranfield in the International Critical Commentary, F. F. Bruce, John Witmer in the Bible Knowledge Commentary). Others, however, notably D. Martyn-Lloyd Jones as well as Sanday and Headlam in the older International Critical Commentary, disagree.

### Paul's Perplexing Practice (vv. 15-17)

***[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.***

What Paul wanted to do was to fulfill the Law. He wanted to do righteous things. But over and over and over again, he doesn't do them.

Instead, he tells us that he ends up doing the ***“very thing”*** that he hates. And what is it that Paul is doing that he hates so much? It is sin.

Paul's inner desire to do good was being thoroughly frustrated.<sup>7</sup>

He doesn't at all like what he is doing. But, that doesn't mean that he is divided in his mind about what it is he wants to do.

***[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.***

Paul knows that the Law that he is breaking is good. He is not calling into question the morality of the Law.

But, here, he is completely controlled by the principle of the flesh. His “bent” toward sin seems to have a will of its own.

***[17] So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.***

Sin is the active principle within Paul that moves him toward rebellion.

Now, he is not claiming, *“Sin did it! I'm innocent!!”*

He does seem to see himself as somehow separate from the sin force in this verse. But, here, sin and self are so inextricably linked together that when sin prompts toward sinfulness, the ***“I”*** acts, and sins.

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<sup>7</sup> In Romans 6, new life in Christ is characterized as a moral reversal, with new desires to obey God and new abilities to obey God. This moral reversal is completely absent in Romans 7, showing nothing but frustration and desperation.

This moral struggle is something with which every person everywhere can identify. Believer in Jesus or not, Muslim or Jehovah's Witness or Mormon or Jew or Hindu or atheist, all members of the human family are familiar with the conflict between KNOWING what is the right thing to do and even WANTING to do it and still CHOOSING another direction.

Ill: diet (especially after Thanksgiving...)

If you'll remember, that was precisely the point of Romans 2.

And Paul is just honest enough to admit how completely sin reigned over him.

He makes three comments that highlight the intensity of the struggle. On the one hand, within him, there is the total absence of anything good.

### Paul's Frustrating Inability (vv. 18-20)

*I am DEPRAVED (v. 18a)*

***[18a] For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh***

Paul knows himself pretty well. It is true that he might be saying, *“There is nothing good in the fleshly part of me.”*

But I think it is more likely that he is saying, *“Being fleshly, there is nothing good about me.”*

He continues, speaking of a paralysis of the will.

*I am PARALYZED (vv. 18b-19)*

***[18b] 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 wish.***

This is the flip side of his earlier lament. He has already said that he doesn't do the righteous things that he wants to do. Now he admits that he actually commits the sin that he wants to avoid!

III: violations of the command to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and your neighbor as yourself

III: violations of the command to trust God, seeing that by faith we please God.

The more anyone strives to obey God, the more he or she will see how far short they fall of perfect obedience.

There is, welling up within, a rebellion against grateful worship that is characterized by love and trust.

They will recognize - as Paul did - that rote adherence to a set of rules is NOT what God is after. God is after spiritual worship motivated by gratitude and issuing in love and trust - and that is exactly what the unbelieving heart can never give.

So Paul admits inability to trust and obey. He also speaks of forced servitude.

*I am CONTROLLED.* (v. 20)

**[20] But if I am doing the very thing I do not wish, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.**

The thought (as it was in verse 17) is that he is so controlled and empowered and moved by sin, that he is powerless to chart a different course.

Not surprisingly, Paul concludes this section, not just on a note of despair, but on a symphony of despair.

**Lament: THIS is What Hopeless Despair Looks Like (vv. 21-24)**

**A Moral War Within (vv. 21-23a)**

***[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***

The evil he describes here is a controlling force that successfully exerts itself against the higher principle of a longing for obedience.<sup>8</sup>

Here is a man who is enslaved to sin joyfully agreeing with God's Law. He knows that the Law of God is true. He just can't keep it!

There is an intense and bloody civil war raging between Paul's body members and his mind. Different principles control the mind and the "flesh."

But, as Paul describes himself here, the desire to do good which is present in his mind is stymied by the overwhelming power of the flesh.

The internal struggle Paul describes is not that of an irresistible force meeting an immovable object.

III: an irresistible force meeting an immovable object.

There comes a time when "can do" won't cut it.

In the same way, Paul's description of his internal struggle describes a situation in which a "can do" spirit won't cut it with God.

Paul describes himself as a prisoner.

**A Final Conflict Within - LOST (vv. 23b-24)**

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<sup>8</sup> Just because Paul uses the term "inner man" doesn't automatically mean that we can assume he is speaking about a believer. That phrase doesn't equate to the "new man" spoken of in 2 Corinthians 4 which does refer to the believer. And, in the same way, neither is it legitimate to equate the "mind" of Romans 7 with the "renewed mind" of Romans 12. The context has to determine what meaning to ascribe to any particular term, and neither "inner man" nor "mind" are technical terms for believers. Paul is simply saying that who he is on the inside, the immaterial part of him, wanted to do good.

*I am a prisoner of the law of sin in my members. (v. 23b)*

***[23b]...and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.***

This is one of the most graphic pictures the New Testament gives us of what it means to be a captive of sin, to be enslaved to sin: that, even when desires are present for obedience and to do what God says, there is an inability to do so, because sin has complete mastery and dominion.

How many prisoners in penitentiaries around our country long for freedom, even for the ability to get out and do right. But, they are bound in their jail cells, and are unable to escape.

The second nail in the coffin is found at the first part of verse 24.

*I am a wretched man. (v. 24a)*

***[24] Wretched man that I am!***

In chapters 6 and 8, the Christian is the one who has right desires to do the will of God, and the one who has the power to carry those desires out.

Here, in chapter 7, Paul considers himself to be wretched (that is miserable, pitiful, distressed, and hopeless), because he is *unable* to do what he really wants to do.

He has already said that the Christian has died to sin, and moves in the new sphere of life. He has likened salvation to a baptism which pictures death and resurrection, and compared him to a slave bought by a new master, and to a widow set free to marry again.

It would frustrate and negate his whole argument if he now confessed, at the time of writing, that he was a miserable wretch, a prisoner to sin's law.

Finally, Paul gives expression to his particular need.

*I am in need of someone who will set me free. (v. 24b)*

***[24b]...Who will set me free from the body of this death?***

Writing of his condition, Paul says that he is in need of someone who will come along to grant him freedom.

He knows that there is the possibility of freedom only for those who are rescued by a strong Deliverer on the outside.

So, in verses 13-14, we saw that spiritual death was produced by personal sin. That death consists of hopeless separation from God.

And in verses 15-24 we have seen that in its wake, spiritual death leaves a hopeless situation of bondage and slavery. In that condition, even when a person wants to do what God wants him to do - he can't.

The whole passage has been a lament - and Paul turns on a dime and shifts to thanksgiving and praise as he reflects on what God has done for him in Jesus! THIS is what gratitude looks like.

**Thanksgiving: This Is What GRATITUDE Looks Like. (v. 25)**

**Jesus Christ Sets Me Free... (v. 25a)**

***[25a] Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord." (v. 25a)***

Paul simply can't contain himself. He has come to the end of his lament. Now, speaking as the Christian he is at the time of this writing, he gives thanks for the deliverance that is his through Christ.

The people of Kuwait understand that kind of gratitude for deliverance. The people who lived under the shadow of the Iron Curtain for over 75 years can identify.

And so can you, and so can I. Believers in Jesus Christ are those who say with Paul, "*Thanks, Father, for my deliverance through Jesus.*"

We saw our hopelessness; we knew bondage; we understood our imprisonment. There was nothing we could do.

So - Jesus did it for us. He delivered us from the body of this death. He set us free to be under grace, to live to God, to mature as Christians, to inherit eternal life.

Under any view, Paul steps back in verse 25b to draw a conclusion concerning verses 13-24.

**...To Win the Battle! (v. 25b)**

*[25b] 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.*

For a long time, I believed that this was a positive statement about the Christian's struggle. I do not now believe that is the case.

Coming to verses 24-25 with the understanding that Paul was speaking of his experiences as a non-believer all through the passage gives reasonableness to this ending.

He admits that his present experience as a non-believer is wretched.

He cries for someone to deliver him from the power of sin in his experience.

He give thanks that Jesus is the One who has set him free, in his present experience through redemption.

He summarizes the passage, highlighting the present struggle in life of mind vs. flesh.

What he is doing at the very end is restating the argument that has been the theme of 7:13-25, namely that in the unbelieving heart a continuous battle rages between the flesh and the mind.

And, as we have seen this morning, the mind (committed to the higher good of the law of God) is unable to win the battle, because the person is enslaved to sin.

**Conclusion:**

As I mentioned at the beginning this morning, there is a lot of debate about the meaning of this passage.

Some say that it was written to describe the experience of believers. Others - like myself - believe that Paul is describing the experience of the unsaved.

Regardless what conclusion we arrive at as to the thrust of this passage, nobody is denying that Christians struggle with sin.

It is possible that the believer will feel much the same feelings as those which Paul expresses in this passage.

*"I don't do what I want to do, and I do what I don't want to do."*

And, in fact, the reality is that the structures and the patterns of sin described in chapter 7 are not eradicated at conversion. We enter new life in Christ wearing the graveclothes of our old life in Adam.

And, just as it was possible for a believer to be enslaved to sin even after having been released from it, so it is also possible that a Christian might be caught up in something like the struggle pictured in chapter 7 - if he is not using the resources God provides for combating sin.

But, moral defeat - which is the cry of Romans 7 - is not the inevitable expression of the Christian life. Moral struggle is. Weariness with the trials and the evil of this world is. Groaning at the unfairness and injustice of life is.

To the believer, God says, *"Your situation is not at all the same as for the one outside of Christ. Their situation is hopeless and utterly despairing. You have hope."*

Through the resources God provides - resources we will see as we turn to Romans 8! - believers can make progress. We can learn to not yield to temptation. We can grow in holiness.



More and more, we can give spiritual worship to God that is motivated by gratitude and issues in love and faith.

This morning, we praise the Lord for our deliverance from death and bondage.

Present Gospel..

Praise the Lord for our deliverance..

Close in prayer

Appendix: Evidence for Paul describing the experience of someone outside of Christ in Romans 7:14-25.

- 14 - Paul's reference to his being "*of flesh*" is a near technical term for being outside of Christ.
- 14 - Paul's reference to "*sold into bondage to sin*" is a very unusual way to refer to someone who is regenerate. A saved person has been bought (redeemed) out of the marketplace of sin.
- 18 - When Paul says that nothing good dwells in his flesh, he seems to be indicating that all he is, is flesh. That is not true of a believer.
- 23 - It is inconsistent to refer to a believer as a "prisoner of the law of sin." Believers in Jesus have been set free from the law of sin and of death (8:2)
- 24 - It seems inappropriate to refer to a child of God as a "wretched man"
- 25 - Paul is waiting for someone to set him free from "the body of this death" when believers (by definition) have been set free.

how difficult it is to grasp the thought of Romans 6-8 all broken up into pieces, as we are doing, almost of necessity. It would be better to be able to give it all in one whack, etc....

Illustration orienting to Law, opportunity, opportunists,

Ill: "opportunity" - the Greek word (aphorme) is often used in military and commercial contexts to denote the base of operations for an expedition or a war.

This is the first time "flesh" is used in its fully derogatory sense in Romans - but certainly not the last time.

Paul would tell us that we had no real choice in the matter. People who are "in the flesh" can accomplish nothing but fruit bearing for death.

Cranfield believes Paul is saying that Christians do actually serve God in newness of the Spirit, not merely that he is saying we "should." Good point.

Cranfield believes Paul is referring to the general condition of the race of mankind prior to the giving of the commandment in the Garden of Eden. This would make better sense if Paul had not been so plainly using the autobiographical "I".

I want to extend a word of thanks to Todd Havekost, who has done extensive research on this passage. Todd's help was invaluable in preparing this message.

In fact, I am aware that my presentation this morning will fly in the face of much popular teaching on this passage. I would mention, though, that there is a long and healthy tradition behind the interpretation I am suggesting.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones takes this position and says, "It is really astonishing that anyone who has worked carefully through chapter 6 could conceivably say that in chapter 7, verses 13-25, Paul describes the regenerate man at the height of his experience."

The structure of 7:13ff is the same as that of 6:1-14, 6:15-23; and 7:7-12.

Paul begins with a false inference, follows with a "May it never be," and ends with a refutation of the false inference.

This passage is a further illustration of the idea that indwelling sin produces death, taken from the life of a Jew (but applicable to the struggling Gentile) who sought to keep the Law but encountered habitual failure and chronic desperation.

According to Romans 6:14, to be under law is to be under the domination of sin, which is exactly the situation in 7:14-25.

In Philippians 3:3-6 Paul used the present tense to vividly describe his pre-regenerate state.

As well, there may be something to be said for seeing verses 12-14a as a parenthesis, speaking again to the topic of the Law. This would leave verse 14b picking up the thought and the time frame of verse 11, when he was dead. That enables him to write of experiences he had while dead in the present tense.

C.E.B. Cranfield, "A struggle as serious as that which is here described can only take place where the Spirit of God is present and active." But, this is not self-evident. Non-Christians can and often do experience intense moral struggles.

There may be an element of truth to that, at least in the sense that addictive behaviors are difficult to kick. Interestingly enough, there seems to be little dynamic difference between the difficulty in this area for non-believers as opposed to believers.

The word "principle" is the Greek word for "law" (nomos).

Note the similarity between 7:5 and 7:23 - sin at work in the members resulting in death.

The "I" of 7:14-25 sustains a continuing relationship to the Law (vv. 16, 22, 25), with no reference to his relationship to the Spirit (as in 7:6 or in Gal. 5:17).

As Gundry says, "The 'I' in 7:14-25 cannot do the good at all, only the bad." Sin has completely taken over.

If, when we come to verses 24-25, we have understood Paul to have been speaking as a Christian all along through the chapter, then he is saying that his present experience as a believer is wretched. He cries for someone to deliver him from the power of sin in his experience. He gives thanks that Jesus is the he One who will set him free, in the future. Then, he summarizes the passage, highlighting the present struggle in life of mind vs. flesh.

Far from being a parallel passage to Romans 7, Gal. 5 represents a confident call to live by the Spirit, a call which results in victory.

The Law is a good thing which sin used and uses to further its diabolical purposes.

That just as sin can take the most beautiful things and make them ugly, so God is able to take the saddest and most hopeless and the ugliest - and make something beautiful.

In the first chapter of Romans, Paul clearly identified his audience as Christians when he wrote, *“to the called of Jesus Christ; to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints.”* But in the intervening space he has not addressed his readers as fellow Christians (although he does so twice in this one passage). Here, he reminds us that he is writing to fellow believers.

Look at all of the “may it never be” responses in this section of Romans.

In John Bunyan’s classic allegory of the Christian life *Pilgrim’s Progress*, there is a scene near the front of the book which illustrates what Paul has been talking about.

In this scene, Christian (the star of the book), is taken to a room by his guide, “Interpreter.” This room is hopelessly dusty.

In the calm of the room, everything is fine. But then another man “Law” comes in and begins to sweep the dust with a broom. The dust begins to rise and swirl around so much that Christian is almost suffocated.

In that scene, the dust symbolizes our sin. The suffocating swirling of that sin occurs when God’s commands are brought to bear on our lives.

Christian knows that he must get out of that room if he is going to live, so he flees the room of the Law, and rushes down the road to salvation.

As will become increasingly clear, I believe Paul is describing the experience of anyone BEFORE he or she comes to know Jesus. Non-Christian alternative religions are filled with people whose consciences are exactly what Paul describes here. They want to do good. The apostle Paul does not place all men on an equal moral plane. All men are equally condemned before God because of their sin. But, not all men are equally committed to the practice of evil. The bottom line here in Romans 7 is that even for those who struggle and wrestle and strive to do good and to obey and to not sin, there is no hope. The struggle can have no godly resolution, because there is no internal capacity to respond to sin’s temptations with strength.

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<sup>9</sup> As has been noted by F.F. Bruce, if love, which is essentially a commitment to give, is the standard by which we measure our lives - and I think it is - then “coveting” describes the ultimate perversion of love, which is the desire to possess.