

Introduction:

"I do not understand how this happened again. I know and believe God's will. I want to obey God's will. I promised myself and God I would do what He said. But despite that, I did exactly what I said I would never do again. I sinned. I hate what I have done and yet I keep going back to it and I don't understand why. I know what I am supposed to do, but it is as though my body just does what it wants. I am not in control of my life anymore, sin is."

What does that sound like to you? An excuse maker? A weak Christian? A hypocrite? A non-committed, weak-minded hater of God? Would you believe it is the apostle Paul? That was basically a paraphrase of **Romans 7:14-23**. Though this passage has confused me over the years, I have always come back to this point—been there, done that. Sadly, while I believe Paul was referring to his life under the Law before Christ, his description has too often been me since becoming a Christian. Can anybody else relate to this?

Sadly, because I have misunderstood this chapter for a long time, I believe I have missed out on God's great promise of victory over sin. Further, I have been of little help to anyone who was trying to fight sin. We often speak of confessing sin (cf. **I John 1:9**). Were you aware the Greek word translated "confess" is "homologeō," which means "to say the same thing as." In the biblical context, to confess means to say the same thing as God about something. To confess our sins is to say the same thing as God about sin. Regrettably, I am afraid I have always stopped a little short of saying the same thing as God about sin. However, recently, I believe I have come closer to understanding this passage and the nature of sin. I would like to share it with you.

Discussion:

- I. Sin is defined by God's law.
 - A. **Romans 7:7** says Paul learned coveting was a sin because the law defined it as such. According to **Romans 3:20**, no one is justified by works of law. Rather, we know what sin is through God's law. John corresponds with Paul's definition of sin. "Sin is lawlessness," **I John 3:4**. We sin whenever we do what defies God's law.
 - B. In fact, the law of God was given to demonstrate that all are sinners and to shut us all up under sin (**Romans 3:19; Galatians 3:22**).
- II. Sin distorts God's law.
 - A. **Romans 7:5, 8, 11** all make some surprising claims about sin. Sin uses God's law to further its cause to entrap us. Sin distorts the very thing God intended to define and help us avoid sin in order to produce sin within us.
 - B. Some commentators struggle with these verses and try to make them say something else. They fear these verses blame God's law for sin. Paul anticipated that same objection however, in **vss. 7, 13**. The law was not to blame for Paul's sins. Paul was to blame. Sin simply used God's good law to its advantage and Paul, like us all, fell for it.
 - C. To understand this concept, look at how Satan took advantage of God's law to tempt Eve to eat the forbidden fruit in **Genesis 3:1**. Focusing Eve on God's prohibitions caused her to desire what God prohibited. **Proverbs 9:17** highlights this issue. We seem to naturally want whatever is forbidden, sometimes simply because it is forbidden. This demonstrates a point where we need to be cautious. When we make serving God nothing more than a set of rules to be studied, argued about and followed, we are setting ourselves up for a fall. Sin thrives on that mindset.
- III. Sin deceives.
 - A. In **Romans 7:11**, Paul said sin, taking opportunity through God's commandment, deceived him. The Hebrew writer also spoke of the deceitfulness of sin (**Hebrews 3:13**). **Ephesians 4:22** explained that the old self was corrupted because of the deceitfulness of our lusts.
 - B. Look again at Satan's temptation of Eve in **Genesis 3:4-5**. He lied. He is the father of lies (**John 8:44**). Sin deceives us, telling us that God's law is holding us back. God is holding us back from fun, fulfillment or satisfaction. Sin promises us that it will delight our eyes, provide for our body and fulfill our self-esteem. Sin says it will give us a fuller life. However sin is lying.

IV. Sin destroys.

- A. In **Romans 7:11**, Paul explained that sin not only deceived him, it killed him. Sin is destructive. James said the same thing in **James 1:14-16**. According to **Romans 6:23**, the wages of sin is death. The greatest damage caused by sin is this spiritual death, this separation from God (**Isaiah 59:2**).
- B. Sin not only kills our spirit, it destroys our lives. Look at the sin of Adam and Eve in **Genesis 3**. Their perfect life was ruined by eating God's forbidden fruit. Our lives are never perfect because sin is already in the world, but we must understand that our sins will tear our lives apart. Sin destroys our reputation, our influence, our marriages, our family relationships, our jobs, etc. Think for just a moment, what is the end of the sins in our lives? Sins like murder, stealing, embezzling will cost us our relationships, our jobs, our families and even put us in jail. Sins like lust, pornography, immorality will destroy our outlook on other people, our marriages and even our relationships with our children. Sins like lying, gossiping, outbursts of wrath, etc. cause others not to trust us, they turn our spouses, kids, parents, friends and brethren against us. Sins like gluttony and coveting send us on a downward spiral of unsatisfied living and even produce all manner of health issues.
- C. No doubt, sometimes life is just bad no matter how we have lived. Job's life demonstrates that. However, if we see constant turmoil and problems, we might want to first look at ourselves and our sins. Are we causing our own problems by following the deceitfulness of sin? We will reap what we sow (**Galatians 6:7-8**).

V. Sin dominates.

- A. Here is where I have fallen short regarding fully confessing sin, that is, saying exactly what God says about it. In **Romans 7:14**, Paul said he was sold into bondage to sin. What did he mean by that? He meant that he had handed control of his life over to sin. At some point in his life, he had, of his own free will, sinned. When he did that, he started a pattern. Then he sinned again and deepened the pattern. As he said in **Romans 6:19**, when we submit to sin, it will produce more sin. In **Romans 6:16**, he said when we submit ourselves to obey the deceptions of sin we become slaves to sin. We are giving up control of our lives and giving it to sin. That is why we struggle so hard to quit sinning. We have trained our bodies to sin. Sin has become a habit. It has become second nature to us. Paul taught this in **Ephesians 2:1-3**.
- B. Have you ever heard of body memory? Do you remember the last time you were driving to work or to the store and as you left your spouse said, "On the way, can you pick up the dry cleaning?" "Absolutely," you responded. You got in the car and said, "Don't forget the dry cleaning." As you pulled out of the driveway you said, "Don't forget the dry cleaning." But then the radio started playing. You started singing (or whatever you do in the car). Next thing you know you are at work or the store and you forgot the dry cleaning. Then the cell phone rings and your spouse said, "Did you get the dry cleaning?" "Um, no I was going to get it on the way home, is that ok?" You get in the car and say, "Don't forget the dry cleaning." You pull out of the parking lot and say, "Don't forget the dry cleaning." The next thing you know you are walking through the front door of the house and your spouse says, "Where is the dry cleaning?" You have traveled to work and the store so much that when your mind is off the subject of dry cleaning for even a moment, the body just takes over and does what you trained it to do. That is body memory. That is what Paul is describing in **Romans 7**. We have trained our bodies to sin. We are constantly telling ourselves, "I am not going to sin. I am not going to sin." But the moment our mind wanders to something else, our body takes over and behaves the way we have trained it. Sin has become our master. Sin now dwells within us and dominates us. It is too late for us. There is nothing we can do about it. We are not strong enough to overcome the years of training to which we have subjected our bodies or the attacks of Satan.
- C. Are you in this picture? Are there any sins to which you are still enslaved? Gossip, outbursts of wrath, bitterness, foul language, coarse jesting, backbiting, arrogance, pride, lust, materialism, covetousness, greed, immorality, pornography, alcohol, drugs, gambling, disrespecting authority, disobedience to parents, lying, stealing, homosexuality, jealousy, and on and on? Do not think any of these is less than the others. Each and every one in their own way will take over your life and destroy it, do not be deceived.

VI. We are delivered by God's Son.

- A. Paul concluded his description of his personal enslavement to sin saying, "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?" (**Romans 7:24**). He then said, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (**vs. 25**). Jesus Christ delivers us from our body of death. **Romans 8:2** says, "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death." That is, Paul claimed to be set free from the "law of sin which is in my members" (**7:23**) by the law of the Spirit of life.
- B. Do not miss what this means. In the modern religious world, we have a tendency to view deliverance as merely meaning forgiven of the eternal guilt of our sins. Paul points out that the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus actually sets us free from sin as our taskmaster. God sets us free not only from the guilt of our sins, but from the mastery of sin. We can overcome sin, but not by our own determination, power and strength.
- C. Many turn to **Romans 8:10** to say that even after becoming Christians our bodies remain dead in sin because they are just sinful and we can't do anything about it but our spirit will be alive in righteousness because of the forgiveness of Jesus. However, note how Paul follows up in **vs. 11**. "If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you." Without getting sidetracked by trying to define how the Spirit dwells within us. We will simply note that by the Spirit dwelling in us we conquer the sin that was dwelling in us (**Romans 7:20**) and our mortal bodies are set free from the death that sin produced. That is, our flesh is no longer dead in sin because we are set free from the law of sin and death in our members.
- D. There is so much more I want to say here. I want to point out the growth aspect of this deliverance. I want to discuss our part in this deliverance. I want to discuss God's work in this deliverance. However, I believe this is enough for now. I really only have one point I want to drive home with this lesson. Are you like Paul and me? Do you know that feeling of having been enslaved to sin and not being able to stop on your own? Have you gotten to the point where you just overlook some of the sins and hope God will too? Or have you gotten to the point where you have thought about giving up? If so, hope in Christ. Jesus did not die for you to leave you in your sins. He died to deliver you from them. If you rely on Him, He will deliver you. You have been sold into bondage to sin, but Jesus can and will set you free. It will take time and growth. But wait on Him and He will deliver you. Keep on in Christ and it will happen. Don't get complacent and don't give up. Trust Jesus.

Conclusion:

By way of conclusion I think it will be helpful to see the rest of Paul's story. In **Romans 7:7-13**, Paul confessed that he had had struggles with coveting. Sin had produced all manner of coveting in his life. **Romans 7:14-24** demonstrated that Paul had been unable to conquer his covetousness on his own. **Romans 7:25-8:4** demonstrated that Paul found deliverance in Jesus Christ. Now look at **Philippians 4:12-13**. We often read **vs. 13** and take comfort that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. However, notice Paul's context. He had learned the secret of contentment. He had not always known it. He had learned it. Paul was delivered not only from the guilt of his sins, but from the sins themselves. He conquered sin, not by his own strength but by the strength of Christ. In the same way, as we grow in Christ we will learn the secrets of overcoming our temptations and sins. Praise God!