

Introduction:

Romans 7:14-25 is an important passage. It reminds us what happens when we are in control of our own lives. Even Paul said when he was in control of his own life, it always ended in sin and failure. His only hope was Jesus. How can we say any different? Whether the sin is gossip, pride, lust, or sexual immorality if we are simply following our own path, we will always end up right back in sin and eternal destruction. Jesus' path, however, leads to life (**Matthew 7:13-14**). Where we struggle Jesus' path is not always the easiest. In fact, Jesus' path is not a set of dos and don'ts. Jesus path is one of total surrender. Walking Jesus' path means giving ourselves and everything about ourselves completely to Him. In many cases, it means sacrificing everything in order to know Jesus and his way. The disciples found this out after Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler. When Peter bragged to Jesus about what the disciples had left in contrast with the rich young ruler, Jesus gave what is perhaps His most shocking bit of teaching. We can find the accounts in **Matthew 19:28-30; Mark 10:29-31; Luke 18:29-30**. There are six principles we need to note about freedom in Christ from this teaching.

Discussion:

- I. This is not a command to leave.
 - A. I know this first point is a bit shocking. We are so used to reading all of Jesus' statements as commands that we may overlook Jesus did not command anyone to leave houses, land, parents, children, spouses, or anything else. This statement is not a command.
 - B. Rather, if you read it again, you will note that Jesus is merely stating a fact. Those who have left these things will be rewarded. Jesus' point is the sacrifice is worth it. Jesus' statement is not that every Christian has to sacrifice all these things. Rather, He is merely commenting on the fact that some will and they will be rewarded.
 - C. As a specific example demonstrating God was not commanding this. Consider **Acts 5:4**. Some of the earliest Christians were sacrificing their lands to provide relief to needy brethren. Ananias and Sapphira were lying. They were not sacrificing everything but were acting like they were. As Peter rebuked Ananias, he pointed out Ananias was not commanded to leave his lands. They were his and were at his disposal.
- II. We must be willing to give up our life as we know it.
 - A. Having said that this is not a command, we must not close the book on this scripture and skip on our merry way thinking Jesus is asking nothing of us. We need to recognize Jesus' statement does in fact mean we may be called on to sacrifice everything. We may have to leave our homes, lands, children, parents, siblings, spouses...everything. However, these are not to be considered exhaustive lists. Rather, this list is given as a figure of speech. The figure is called Synecdoche and is commonly referred to as "using a part for the whole."
 - B. In **Luke 9:24** and **Luke 17:33**, Jesus explained, "For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it." Jesus' point is not merely about giving up these specific items. Rather, His point is that we need to be willing to give up life as we know it. Being a child of God may mean change of jobs. It may mean a complete change of career path and goals. It may mean losing your land. It may mean being ostracized by your family. It may mean leaving or being left by a spouse. It may mean being in a completely different socio-economic class. It may mean totally changing your worldview. As we said above, it may not mean any of that. But, then again, it may.
 - C. In **Philippians 3:3-11**, Paul demonstrated this willingness. Before turning to Jesus, he was on the fast track to power, influence, and popularity among the Jews and their leaders. He was head and shoulders above everyone else his age. He was on the fast track to be on the Pharisees speaking circuit, if you will. He would receive accolades and praises by all the Jews. However, when he turned to Jesus, all that changed. Suddenly, he was no longer the golden boy. He was the traitor. He had gone over to the other side. What did this mean about the specifics of Paul's life? We don't know. Perhaps his parents disowned him. He pretty much gave up his tentmaking work to travel the known world for Jesus (cf. **Acts 18:3**). He lost his prestige among the Jews. He was run out of many cities.

- D. We may not know exactly what we'll be called on to sacrifice. The point is we need to be ready to sacrifice it all; we must be ready to give up life as we know it in order to live for Jesus.

III. Sacrifice comes for various reasons.

- A. Some people look at our key verses and try to very specifically define what it means to “leave” all these things. I know that especially happens for the statement about leaving the wife. However, Jesus did not explain exactly what He meant by this. Instead, we need to consider what the Scripture says in other places. We see that sometimes these sacrifices are demanded and other times they are voluntary.
- B. For instance, consider the idea of leaving houses, lands, and possessions for Jesus sake.
1. Jesus makes this statement on the heels of the story about the rich young ruler. He was commanded to sacrifice his material goods because they were coming between him and God (**Matthew 19:20-22**). He had to give them up; otherwise, he would be lost.
 2. On the other hand, in **Acts 4:32-37**, many of the disciples were selling their houses, land, and possession in order to help their brethren. Was this a command from God? No. Would they be lost if they didn't? No. But were they leaving all of it for Jesus' sake? Absolutely.
 3. Then again in **Acts 8:1-3**, a great persecution arose and many Christians in Jerusalem were driven from their lands and houses. They were not commanded by God to do this, they didn't volunteer to do this, but because they were faithful to Jesus, they gave up their lands through persecution. It was for the kingdom's sake.
- C. Because the statement about leaving a wife is so shocking, let's consider what this could mean. Is Jesus saying a man can just leave his wife because he became a Christian or does the scripture indicate something else? The scripture shows three potential means to fulfill this statement.
1. First, we shouldn't immediately assume this means divorce as so many are want to do trying to find excuse to put spouses away for numerous causes. Keep in mind that Jesus said this based on Peter's statement, “We have left everything for you.” Peter had done what Jesus was talking about. We know in **Matthew 8:14**, Peter was married. Did he divorce his wife to follow Jesus? No. We know from **I Corinthians 9:5**, that Peter had a believing wife who traveled with him. However, in **Matthew 19**, he claimed to have left everything. He didn't mean he had sold his house, forsaken his family, divorced his wife. It meant that in order to follow Jesus at this time, he had left his wife at home. He did not use his wife, his job, his home, his land as an excuse to stay home instead of traveling with Jesus. Did he absolutely have to do this in order to be right with God? Not necessarily, but Jesus says he would be rewarded for making that choice. Clearly, in later travels he was able to take his wife with him. By the way, let's not miss the sacrifice Peter's wife was making as she let Peter travel with Jesus instead of taking care of the home front.
 2. In the **Matthew** and **Mark** contexts, this discussion happened after Jesus' teaching on divorce and remarriage. According to **Matthew 19:9**, whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman is committing adultery. The only exception to that teaching is if he divorced her because she committed sexual immorality. Therefore, if a man turns to Christ and finds that he his marriage is adultery, the only alternative for him is to leave the unlawful wife, to cease the marriage that is adultery. Interestingly, in **Matthew 19:12**, Jesus referred to folks who were in this situation as “eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.” That is, they were celibate for the kingdom's sake.
 3. **I Corinthians 7:12-16** provides another time in which someone might “leave” a spouse of the sake of the kingdom. If an unbelieving or unfaithful spouse refuses to live with the Christian spouse, the Christian is not obligated to follow the unbeliever around trying to make the marriage work. The Christian can let the unbelieving spouse leave as sad as it seems.
- D. I know this is tough and the use of spouses in this context really demonstrates the degree of sacrifice Jesus asks of us. Sadly, too many will choose their spouse over serving God His way. They may find they are unlawfully married, but won't choose God over the marriage. Or the spouse may threaten to leave so the Christian backs off in his/her commitment to God and God's path in order to keep the spouse happy and the marriage together. While the sacrifices may come from various reasons and take on different forms, we get back to our last point, we need to be willing to give up life as we know it in order to follow Jesus.

- IV. We will lose whatever we put before Jesus.
- A. The rich young ruler put his possessions before Jesus (**Matthew 19:21-22**). He simply couldn't sacrifice his possessions. He couldn't give up his life as he knew it. Here is the problem; he couldn't actually keep his possessions. Do you remember the story of Mary and Martha in **Luke 10:38-42**? Jesus' statement to Martha was that Mary had chosen the good part that would not be taken from her. The implication is what Martha had chosen would be taken away.
 - B. The fact is, everything we put before Jesus will be taken from us. We will not be able to hang on to it as much as we try. Some of it may be taken from us even in this life. First, the sins that enslave us when we do not surrender to Jesus will steal much of what we want to hang on to—our family, our money, our health. Additionally, the more we worry about money, often the more we cause our own downfall through money. The more we try to hang on to people, the more we learn they are fickle and won't always play by our rules anyway.
 - C. Here is the really sad part, if we put our possessions, our families, our careers, our lives as we want them before Jesus, we will eventually lose all those things. Sadly, when we have lost those things anyway, we won't have Jesus. We will have lost it all and we will be lost. It is true, when we turn to Jesus, we may have to sacrifice many things, but if we don't turn to Jesus we are going to lose those things anyway.
- V. Stop hanging on to life as you want it, but grab hold of life as Jesus offers it.
- A. If we are going to lose all those things anyway, we might as well quit trying to hang on to life as we want it. We must quit trying to hang on to our lives as we planned them. If we keep trying to hang on to that, we'll lose it, plus we won't have Jesus. However, if we sacrifice life the way we want it and accept the life Jesus offers us, we'll be so much better off.
 - B. Yes, perhaps we'll lose our land, possessions, family, career, goals, but we'll gain Jesus. Remember **Luke 9:24-25**. What profit will it be to us if we gain our houses, lands, possessions, spouse, children, parents, siblings, career, fame, power, influence, glory for a little while but then lose it all along with our soul later? What good is that?
 - C. Quit trying to hang on to life as you would have it. Quit trying to preserve life as you want it. Let go. Surrender to Jesus. Start reaching out to life as Jesus offers it to you.
- VI. Life as Jesus offers it is better.
- A. All sacrifice will be rewarded. If we lose these things because of persecution, because we had to sacrifice them to stay with Jesus, or because we voluntarily gave these things up to serve Him, we will be rewarded. Did we give up our possessions? We gain so much more through the sharing of the brethren. Did we lose family? We'll gain family through the body of Christ.
 - B. However, more importantly, we'll gain eternal life. The wages of our sins is death according to **Romans 6:23**. However, the free gift in Christ is eternal life. There is nothing we are holding on to that can provide this for us. Our parents won't. Our children won't. Our spouses won't. Our houses won't. Our cars won't. Our possessions won't. Our portfolios won't. Only Jesus will.
 - C. The real question comes down to whether we believe Jesus. Do we really believe He has a better offer? Or do we think having a nice house, lots of land, a great retirement, is the better offer? Do we think letting our parents, children, spouses, and friends be happy with us is a better offer? A man named Jim Elliott once made an amazing statement: "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose." If you decide to hang on to and preserve life as you want it and have planned it, you will lose it all. If you are willing to give it up and reach for life as Jesus offers it, you will be rewarded eternally more than you can possibly imagine.

Conclusion:

The question we need to ask is found in **Matthew 16:26**. "What shall a man give in return for his soul?" Are we willing to give our lives to Jesus and let Him lead us wherever He wants us to go? What if that means giving up our possessions, our families, our homes, our goals? What is the eternal life of our soul worth? It is not an easy question. Oh, it's an easy question to answer correctly. However, it is not an easy question to live. Trust me, the life Jesus offers is better than the one you have planned. Are you ready to surrender to Him?