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# Paul's Epistle to the Romans

LESSON **XVI**: THE BELIEVER'S REALIZATION OF INNER CORRUPTION — CHAP 7 VERSES 7-25

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## THE LAW AND ROMANS 7

“In 7:1-6 Paul teaches that people must be released from the bondage of the Mosaic law in order to be joined to Christ because life under the law brings forth only sin and death. This sections brings to a climax the negative assessment of the law that is such a persistent motif in Rom 1-6 and thereby also raises with renewed urgency perhaps the most serious theological issue with which Paul (and early Christianity generally) had to grapple: *How can God's law have become so negative a force in the history of salvation? How could the law be both 'good' and an instrument of sin and death?* ... The law, Paul affirms, is 'God's law' (v. 22) and is 'good' (vv. 12, 17), 'holy' (v. 12), 'just' (v. 12), and 'spiritual' (v. 14). How, then, could the law come to have so deleterious an effect? How could the good law of God 'work wrath' (4:15), 'increase the trespass' (5:20), and 'arouse sinful passions' (7:5)? This Paul seeks to explain in 7:7-25, pointing to sin as the culprit that has used the law as a 'bridgehead' to produce more sin and death (7:7-12) and to the individual 'carnal' person, whose own weakness and internal division allows sin to gain the mastery, despite the 'goodness' of the law (7:13-25). *Romans 7:7-25, therefore, has two specific purposes: to vindicate the law from any suggestion that it is, in itself, 'sinful' or evil; and to show how, despite this, the law has come to be a negative force in the history of salvation.* Both major sections of 7:7-25 (7:7-12; 13-25) follow the dialogical style with which we have become so familiar in Romans: question — emphatic rejection ('by no means!') — explanation... We may divide this section into two major parts, v. 13 being a 'bridge' between the two. In 7:7-12 Paul uses a narrative to show how sin has used the law to bring death. Verses 14-25, on the other hand, use present tense verbs to describe the constant battle between the 'mind,' which agrees with God's law, and the 'flesh,' or the 'members,' which succumb to 'the law of sin.' The result, then, is that the law of God, which aroused sin, is impotent to break the power of sin.

“This far I have described the teaching of Rom 7:7-25 without identifying the 'I' (*egō*) who figures so prominently in these verses. This is deliberate, for we must insist again that *the central topic of these verses is not human nature, or anthropology, but the Mosaic law. Because this is the case, the most important teaching of the section is the same however the 'I' is identified. The law, God's good, holy, and spiritual gift, has been turned into an instrument of sin because of the 'fleshiness' of people. It is therefore unable to deliver a person from the power of sin, and people who look to it for such deliverance will only experience frustration and ultimate condemnation.* Having said this, however, the identification of the 'I' in this passage is not an insignificant matter. It affects, to some extent, the way we understand Paul's presentation of the law, but, even more, the way we understand the Christian life. And certainly the identification of this 'I' affects dramatically the interpretation of individual verses.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 423f]

## THE IDENTITY OF “I” IN ROMANS 7:7-25

“*I* (ἐγώ — *egō*). My personality proper; my moral self-consciousness which has approved the law and has developed vague desires for something better.” [Vincent, *Word Studies*, vol 3 pg 81] To evaluate the identity of “I” in these verses, we will divide the question into two sections.

**WHAT IS THE IDENTITY OF “I” IN THE PASSAGE AS A WHOLE?** — “In the history of interpretation, four main identifications of the *egō* in this passage have been proposed. Not all of these identifications are maintained for the entire passage, and many (perhaps most) scholars now combine one or more of these identifications in their interpretations of the chapter. It might be more accurate, then, to speak of four 'directions' in interpretation. In describing these directions, I will include an 'expanded paraphrase' of vv. 9-10a because these verses are crucial for the correct identification of this *egō*.

● **1. The autobiographical direction.** The average Christian is — understandably! — likely to ask, 'What is all the fuss about?' Doesn't Paul use 'I'? Who else except Paul would it be? Most interpreters throughout the history of the Christian church have agreed and concluded that Paul uses *egō* simply because he is describing his own experience. Most, however, would quickly add that he describes his experience not because it is unique but because it is typical — the experience of 'every person.' Those who defend an autobiographical interpretation differ over what experience in Paul's life he may be describing in vv. 7-12. The following are the main possibilities:

■ **a. The awakening of the sinful impulse at the time of Paul's 'coming of age,' or 'bar mitzvah':** 'I was living without understanding the real power of sin at one time, but when I became responsible for the commandment, sin sprang to life and I perceived myself to be under condemnation' (or 'perceived myself to be unable to throw off sin's power').

■ **b. The realization of condemnation just previous to Paul's conversion:** 'I thought myself to be "alive" in the days when, as a self-satisfied Pharisee, I thought I was fulfilling the law. But when the Spirit began to make clear to me the real, inward, meaning of God's law, I saw that I was far short of its demands and was, in fact, under condemnation.' [see, e.g., Augustine, Calvin, Hodge, Murray]

● **2. The Adamic direction.** While few have thought that Paul describes the experience of Adam throughout this section, many, from the earliest days of the church, have thought that vv. 7-12 can be applied directly only to Adam. 'I was fully alive

[spiritually] before the “law” not to eat of the fruit of the tree came. But when that commandment was given, sin [through the serpent] sprang to life and brought upon me spiritual condemnation.’ Most contemporary interpreters, while not thinking that vv. 7-11 describe only Adam, think that reference to Adam is present and prominent [this view was held by several church fathers, including Theodoret]. Interpretations of vv. 14-25 by proponents of this view differ widely, but perhaps the most attractive is that of Longenecker. He argues that after using the idea of corporate solidarity with Adam in vv. 7-13 — ‘I in Adam’ — Paul goes on in vv. 14-25 to describe the continuing effects of that solidarity — ‘Adam in me.’

● **3. The Israel direction.** Since Chrysostom, some interpreters have understood the *egō* in at least parts of 7:7-25 (usually vv. 8-10 especially) to be a representation of the people of Israel. ‘We [the nation of Israel] were, relatively-speaking, spiritually “alive” before the giving of the law at Sinai. But when that law was given, it gave sin its opportunity to create transgression and so to deepen and radicalize our spiritual lostness.’ [see, e.g., Chrysostom, Ridderbos, Berkhof] Most of these interpreters, then, think that Paul in vv. 14-25 describes the continuing situation of Jews under the Mosaic law. This is often called the ‘salvation-historical’ view.

● **4. The existential direction.** Convinced that vv. 7-12 cannot be identified with any particular person or experience, many interpreters identify the *egō* in 7:7-25 as nobody in particular and everybody in general. Paul, they argue, is using figurative language to describe the confrontation between a ‘person,’ *qua* person, and the demand of God. Paraphrase of vv. 9-10a in this case is both impossible and inappropriate.

“In assessing these views, three issues are key: the potential lexical range of *egō*; the identification of the ‘law’ depicted in the chapter; and the experience described by Paul in vv. 9-10a. When these are considered, we will find that, while elements of all four of these interpretations are present, a combination of views 1 and 3 yields the best explanation of the text. Paul is describing his own, and other Jews’, experience with the law of Moses: how that law came to the Jewish people and brought to them, not ‘life,’ but ‘death’ (vv. 7-12); and how that law failed, because of the reign of the flesh, to deliver the Jews from the power of sin (vv. 13-25).” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 424ff]

**Comments re: the use of *egō*** — it is widely assumed *egō* can be used as a rhetorical device without any personal reference being intended at all. For example: “*But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.*” (1 Cor 11:31,32 NIV); “*If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.*” (1 Cor 13:1-3 NIV). Several scholars have done research in this area, including non-biblical texts from the same era, some of which are listed by Douglas Moo in his commentary. But after having considered those possibilities, Moo summarizes in this manner: “*When Paul’s use of *egō* is considered — due allowance being made for the influence of Jewish and Greek rhetorical patterns — it is impossible to remove autobiographical elements from *egō* in Rom. 7:7-25.*” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 427]

**Comments re: the law** — “As we have noted, the topic of Rom. 7 is the law; and not just ‘law’ in general, but the *Mosaic* law. This is clear both from Paul’s general usage of *nomos* [the Greek word for law] and from the context. For Paul, the law is basically the torah, the body of instruction and commandments given to the people of Israel through Moses at Sinai. This law is the focus of this chapter, which is linked, through 6:14, to 5:20a, where Paul asserts that ‘the law came in beside’; and this ‘coming in beside’ refers to the giving of the law through Moses (cf. 5:13-14; Gal. 3:19). Moreover, the commandment quoted in v. 7 as representative of the law is from the Decalogue.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 428] Some commentators “widen” the usage of the “law” in several places through this paragraph to refer to God’s law in any form, written or unwritten. This is done to understand the paragraph in a more inclusive manner. Moo argues against that interpretation, believing the “law” throughout this paragraph is the law of Moses: “*Expansion to the situation of all people comes not through a broadening of the reference to ‘law,’ but through the paradigmatic significance of Israel’s experience with the Mosaic law. While Paul directly describes only this experience in this chapter, it has application to all people because what is true of Israel under God’s law through Moses is true ipso facto of all people under ‘law’ (cf. 2:14-15).*” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 428]

**Adam, the law and our relationship to it all in vv. 7-12** — It naturally follows that if Romans 7 concerns the law of Moses, then (1) vv. 7-12 could not refer to everyone directly because not everyone has lived under the Mosaic law; and (2) vv. 7-12 could neither refer to Adam because Paul states the law was given by Moses (cf. 5:13, 14), thousands of years after Adam. **Therefore, while there may be allusions or applications to Adam in these verses, it cannot be the primary teaching of the paragraph.**

**Adam and the most literal rendering of vv. 9-10a** — It must be granted that by taking vv. 9-10a in its most literal sense, one could reach the conclusion Paul was speaking of Adam. After all, who else but Adam could truly say he was “alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came and I disobeyed, I died.” Everyone after Adam and Eve are born sinners, “dead” in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1), therefore, with the exception of Adam, the law does not *bring* death but *confirms* death. But in my understanding of the passage, to make vv. 9-10a refer to Adam actually introduces more problems than it solves (for example, how vv. 9-10a fit back within the context if those verses speak of Adam yet the context is the Mosaic law). To be “alive” and to “die” therefore must not be taken in the most literal sense therefore but modified to suit the context. Moo agrees: “*I prefer to understand ‘I died’ in a theological, but relative, sense: ‘though “I” had sinned, and was condemned before the law came, the coming of the commandment gave sin greater power and destructiveness than ever before, making me fully and personally*

*responsible for my sin. The coming of the law brought to me, then, not life but death (“I died”).”* [Moo, *Romans*, pg 429f]

**“Coming of the commandment” in v. 9 in relation to Israel** — Moo states the most natural interpretation of the words “the coming of the commandment” in v. 9 is to the giving of the law at Sinai. Assuming we are correct in the above points, Moo believes the question now is whether Paul is describing his own encounter with the law or that of the people of Israel generally. Moo prefers the subject to be Israel: “We conclude, then, that *egō* denotes Paul himself but that the events depicted in these verses were not all experienced personally and consciously by the Apostle. It is in this sense that we argue for a combination of the autobiographical view with the view that identifies *egō* with Israel. *Egō* is not Israel, but *egō* is Paul in solidarity with Israel.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 430f]

I humbly submit that I disagree with Douglas Moo on this point, fully recognizing I could easily be in error and Brother Moo has done considering more study on the subject than I. I agree with those who understand Paul to be speaking autobiographically. This in turn leads us to our second question.

***GIVEN PAUL IS SPEAKING OF HIMSELF, IS THE CONFLICT PRESENTED IN 7:14-25 THAT OF A PERSON WHO IS SAVED OR UNSAVED? — AND IF SAVED, WHAT IS THAT PERSON’S SPIRITUAL STATUS?*** — It may be impossible to ever answer that question with any degree of assurance. “It is partly because expositors of Rom. 7 exegete this text with an eye on these larger issues that they have divided so sharply over its interpretation. And *it may be generally said that the interpretation of few passages has been more influenced by one’s broad theological perspective, experience, and sheer a priori assumptions than Rom. 7:14-25*.... Much will depend on the particular perspective from which one approaches the passage and which arguments are given greater weight. Interpreting Rom. 7 is like fitting pieces of a puzzle together when one is not sure of the final outline; the best interpretation is the one that is able to fit the most pieces together in the most natural way. Because of this, *it is inconclusive, and even misleading, to cite several arguments in favor of one’s own view and conclude that the issue has been settled.*” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 443] Some considerations on “both sides of the aisle” (taken mainly from Douglas Moo):

**THE MOST IMPORTANT REASONS FOR THINKING THE EXPERIENCE DEPICTED IN vv. 14-25 IS THAT OF AN UNREGENERATE PERSON:**

- The strong connection of *egō* with ‘the flesh’ (vv. 14, 18, 25) suggest that Paul is elaborating on the unregenerate condition mentioned in 7:5: being ‘in the flesh’
- *Egō* throughout this passage struggles ‘on his / her own’ (cf. ‘I myself’ in v. 25), without the aid of the Holy Spirit
- *Egō* is ‘under the power of sin’ (v. 14b), a state from which every believer is released (6:2, 6, 11, 18-22)
- As the unsuccessful struggle of vv. 15-20 shows, *egō* is a ‘prisoner of the law of sin’ (v. 23). Yet Rom 8:2 proclaims that believers have been set free from this same ‘law of sin (and death).’
- While Paul makes clear that believers will continue to struggle with sin (cf., e.g., 6:12-13; 13:12-14; Gal 5:17), what is depicted in 7:14-25 is not just a struggle with sin but a defeat by sin. This is a more negative view of the Christian life than can be accommodated within Paul’s theology.
- The *egō* in these verses struggles with the need to obey the Mosaic law; yet Paul has already proclaimed the release of the believer from the dictates of the law (6:14; 7:4-6).
- In v. 18 Paul states there is ‘nothing good dwelling in him.’

**THEREFORE ...** for those who find these arguments decisive, vv. 14-25 describe the struggle of the person outside of Christ to do ‘what is good,’ a struggle that is doomed to failure because it is fought without the power of God that alone is able to break the power of sin. Deliverance from this situation comes with the converting, regenerating work of God in Christ, who transfers the believer from the realm of ‘sin and death’ to the realm of ‘the Spirit of life’ (v. 24b; 8:2). Within this general ‘unregenerate’ interpretation are various subdivisions. Some think that the text portrays Paul’s own experience under the law (e.g. Chrysostom, Godet). Others think that Paul is describing Jews under the law generally, or even all people confronted with ‘the law of God.’

**THE MOST IMPORTANT REASONS FOR THINKING THE EXPERIENCE DEPICTED IN VV. 14-25 IS THAT OF A REGENERATE PERSON:**

- *Egō* must refer to Paul himself, and the shift from the past tenses of vv. 7-13 to the present tenses of vv. 14-25 can be explained only if Paul is describing in these latter verses his present experience as a Christian.
- Only the regenerate truly ‘delight in God’s law’ (v. 22), seek to obey it (vv. 15-20), and ‘serve’ it (v. 25); the unregenerate do not ‘seek after God’ (3:11) and cannot ‘submit to the law of God’ (8:7).
- Whereas the ‘mind’ of people outside of Christ is universally presented by Paul as opposed to God and his will (cf. Rom 1:28; Eph 4:17; Col 2:18; 1 Tim 6:5; 2 Tim 3:8; Titus 2:15), the ‘mind’ of *egō* in this text is a positive medium, by which *egō* ‘serves the law of God’ (vv. 22, 25).
- *Egō* must be a Christian because only a Christian possesses the ‘inner person’; cf. Paul’s only other two uses of the phrase in 2 Cor 4:16; Eph 3:16.
- The passage concludes, after Paul’s mention of the deliverance wrought by God in Christ, with a reiteration of the divided state of the *egō* (vv. 24-25). This shows the division and struggle of the *egō* that Paul depicts in these verses is that of the person already saved by God in Christ.

**THEREFORE ...** if these arguments are found to be decisive, then vv. 14-25 will describe an important aspect of ‘normal’ Christian experience: the continuing battle with sin that will never be won as long as the believer, through his or her body, is related to this age. The new age may have dawned, but the believer, until death or the parousia, remains tied to the old age and its powers of sin, the flesh, and the law. Deliverance will come only when God intervenes to transform the ‘body of death’ (vv. 24b-25a; 8:10-11) into the body conformed to the glorious body of Christ (Phil 3:20-21).

Understanding therefore we cannot be overly dogmatic, let’s look at the major interpretations.

**“THE ‘I’ OF ROMANS 7 IS THE UNREGENERATE”** — Most of the early Church Fathers thought these verses described an unregenerate person. At the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, a group of theologians usually called “pietists” reacted against the standard teaching of the Reformation which, in their mind, produced “dead orthodoxy.” The Pietists believed teaching Romans 7 was the “normal” view of Christian lifestyle opened the door too widely for a complacent lifestyle, and therefore returned to the teaching that Paul was speaking of the unsaved under conviction (“halfway” to a true Christian experience). Similar concerns led John Wesley to conclude Romans 7:14-25 was the experience of the unregenerate under conviction. See also Lloyd-Jones, D. M. Davies, F. F. Bruce, *Romans*; H. R. Ridderbos, *Romans*; Godet, *Romans*.

The “scholarly” viewpoint of the twentieth century has been dominated by the 1929 monograph of W. G. Kümmel (according to Moo, substantiated by Hendriksen). This monograph taught Paul was speaking rhetorically and therefore was not rehearsing his own experience at all. Romans 7:14-25 is speaking of an unregenerate person but from the perspective of a Christian. While accepted among scholars, this never gained much ground among the general Christian populace and has encountered considerable criticism as well from other scholars for the last thirty years. The main argument against Kümmel’s interpretation is the insistence that the autobiographical elements of Romans 7 cannot be eliminated. Note that this interpretation is favored among Pelagians and Arminians, although some Reformed theologians have accepted this as well.

Douglas Moo takes the position that Paul is describing his own condition as a Jew under the law, prior to his salvation, and representative of all Jews under bondage of the Mosaic economy. Hodge mentions others who agree with Moo: “Grotius says, that he represents the Jewish people, and sets forth their experience before and after the introduction of the law of Moses. This opinion was adopted by Locke, Estius, and recently by Reiche. Others say that he speaks out of the common consciousness of men.... The experience detailed is that of the natural or unrenewed man throughout. This view is the one generally adopted by modern commentators.” [Hodge, *Romans*, pg 221]

**“THE ‘I’ OF ROMANS 7 IS THE IMMATURE CHRISTIAN”** — In what might be a compromise of several beliefs is the interpretation that the *egō* is that of someone truly saved but new or immature in the faith, a believer seeking to live the Christian life in his or her own power. Such Christians, it is said, must “leave Romans 7 and get into Romans 8.” See, e.g., Wiersbe, *Bible Exposition Commentary: Romans*.

**“THE ‘I’ OF ROMANS 7 IS THE MATURE CHRISTIAN”** — One Church Father that spoke out against the others was Augustine. Augustine’s first position was that this described an unsaved person but he later changed (Moo says partly as a result of his battle with Pelagius over, among other things, the freedom of the will; Hodge states Augustine modified his views years before Pelagius). Augustine’s later position was that Paul was describing a Christian. [see Augustine, *Retractions* 1.23.1 and 2.1.1; *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians* 1.10-11]

Almost all the Reformers adopted Augustine’s view: Luther, Calvin, Melancthon. “Nevertheless, the experience here exhibited is the experience of every renewed man. It sets forth the work of the law first in the work of conviction, vers. 7-13, and afterwards in reference to the holy life of the Christian. This is the Augustinian view of the bearing of this passage adopted by the Lutherans and Reformed, and still held by the great body of evangelical Christians.” [Hodge, *Romans*, pg 222] Luther has a classic statement regarding this: he saw the believer as ‘at the same time a justified person and a sinner.’ “Justification, being an entirely forensic declaration of the believer’s status ‘before God’ (*coram Deo*), does not remove from the believer the presence and influence of sin. Thus, even the child of God, as long as he is in the earthly body, will struggle with sin and fail to do God’s will. The interpretation of vv. 14-25 in terms of ‘normal’ Christian experience was typical of Lutheran and Reformed theology right into the twentieth century and is still widespread.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 444]

This best reflects my understanding of the passage and is taught by such leaders as A. W. Pink, “*The Christian in Romans 7*” article; John MacArthur, *Romans 1-8*; William Hendriksen, *Romans*; Hodge, *Romans*; L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*; F. F. Bruce, *Romans*; Calvin; Robert Haldane, *Romans*; R. C. H. Lenski, *Romans*; John Murray, *Romans*; Nygren, *Romans*; B. H. Carroll, *Interpretation of the English Bible*.

**The understanding of this passage as explained by John MacArthur:** “Some interpreters believe that chapter 7 describes the carnal, or fleshly, Christian, one who is living on a very low level of spirituality. Many suggest that this person is a frustrated, legalistic Christian who attempts in his own power to please God by trying to live up to the Mosaic law. But the attitude expressed in chapter 7 is not typical of legalists, who tend to be self-satisfied with their fulfillment of the law. Most people are attracted to legalism in the first place because it offers the prospect of living up to God’s standards by one’s own power.

**“It seems rather that Paul is here describing the most spiritual and mature of Christians, who, the more they honestly measure themselves against God’s standards of righteousness the more they realize how much they fall short. The closer we get to God,**



*the more we see our own sin. Thus it is immature, fleshly, and legalistic persons who tend to live under the illusion that they are spiritual and that they measure up well by God's standards. The level of spiritual insight, brokenness, contrition, and humility that characterize the person depicted in Romans 7 are marks of a spiritual and mature believer, who before God has no trust in his own goodness and achievements.*

“It also seems, as one would naturally suppose from the use of the first person singular (which appears forty-six times in Rom. 7:7-25), that Paul is speaking of himself. Not only is he the subject of this passage, but it is the mature and spiritually seasoned apostle that is portrayed. **Only a Christian at the height of spiritual maturity would either experience or be concerned about such deep struggles of heart, mind, and conscience. The more clearly and completely he saw God's holiness and goodness, the more Paul recognized and grieved over his own sinfulness....**

“It is such sensitivity that caused the fourth-century church Father John Chrysostom to say in his *Second Homily on Eutropius* that he feared nothing but sin. The person depicted in Romans 7 has a deep awareness of his own sin and an equally deep desire to please the Lord in all things. Only a mature Christian could be so characterized.

“The Puritan writer Thomas Watson observed that one of the certain signs of *‘sanctification is an antipathy against sin ... A hypocrite may leave sin, yet love it; as a serpent casts its coat, but keeps its sting; but a sanctified person can say he not only leaves sin, but loathes it.’* He goes on to say to the Christian, *‘God ... has not only chained up sin, but changed thy nature, and made thee as a king's daughter, all glorious within. He has put upon thee the breastplate of holiness, which, though it may be shot at, can never be shot through.’* (A Body of Divinity, pp. 246, 250).

“The spiritual believer is sensitive to sin because he knows it grieves the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:30), because it dishonors God (1 Cor 6:19-20), because sin keeps his prayers from being answered (1 Pet 3:12), and because sin makes his life spiritually powerless (1 Cor 9:27). The spiritual believer is sensitive to sin because it causes good things from God to be withheld (Jer 5:25), because it robs him of the joy of salvation (Ps 51:12), because it inhibits spiritual growth (1 Cor 3:1), because it brings chastisement from the Lord (Heb 12:57), and because it prevents his being a fit vessel for the Lord to use (2 Tim 2:21). The spiritual believer is sensitive to sin because it pollutes Christian fellowship (1 Cor 10:21), because it prevents participating properly in the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:28-29), and because it can even endanger his physical life and health (1 Cor 11:30; 1 John 5:16).” [MacArthur, *Romans 1-8*, pg 379f]

***“The more seriously a Christian strives to live from grace and to submit to the discipline of the gospel, the more sensitive he becomes to ... the fact that even his very best acts and activities are disfigured by the egotism which is still powerful within him — and no less evil because it is often more subtly disguised than formerly.”*** [Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:358; q.v. MacArthur, *Romans 1-8*, pg 383f]

“Thomas Scott, an evangelical preacher of the Church of England in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, wrote that when a believer ‘compares his actual attainments with the spirituality of the law, and with his own desire and aim to obey it, he sees that he is yet, to a great degree, carnal in the state of his mind, and under the power of evil propensities, from which (like a man sold for a slave) he cannot wholly emancipate himself. He is carnal in exact proportion to the degree in which he falls short of perfect conformity to the law of God.’” [MacArthur, *Romans 1-8*, pg 384]

**Additional comments from A. W. Pink:** “This moan, ‘O wretched man that I am,’ expresses the normal experience of the Christian, and any Christian who does not so moan is in an abnormal and unhealthy state spiritually. The man who does not utter this cry daily is either so out of communion with Christ, or so ignorant of the teaching of Scripture, or so deceived about his actual condition, that he knows not the corruptions of his own heart and the abject failure of his own life. The one who bows to the solemn and searching teaching of God's Word, the one who there learns the awful wreckage which sin has wrought in the human constitution, the one who sees the exalted standard of holiness which God has set before us, cannot fail to discover what a vile wretch he is. If he is given to behold how far short he falls of attaining to God's standard; if, in the light of the divine sanctuary, he discovers how little he resembles the Christ of God; then will he find this language most suited to express his godly sorrow. If God reveals to him the coldness of his love, the pride of his heart, the wanderings of his mind, the evil that defiles his godliest acts, he will cry, ‘O wretched man that I am.’ If he is conscious of his ingratitude, of how little he appreciates God's daily mercies; if he marks the absence of that deep and genuine fervor which ought ever to characterize his praise and worship of that One who is ‘glorious in holiness;’ if he recognizes that sinful spirit of rebellion, which so often causes him to murmur or at least chafe against the dispensations of God in his daily life; if he attempts to tabulate not only the sins of commission but the sins of omission, of which he is daily guilty, he will indeed cry, ‘O wretched man that I am.’ ... In these days of Laodicean complacency and pride, there is considerable talk and much boasting about communion with Christ, but how little manifestation of it do we behold! Where there is no sense of utter unworthiness, where there is no mourning over the total depravity of our nature, where there is no sorrowing over our lack of conformity to Christ, where there is no groaning over being brought into captivity to sin; in short, where there is no crying, ‘O wretched man that I am,’ it is greatly to be feared that there is no fellowship with Christ at all.” [A. W. Pink, *The Christian in Romans 7*]

**TESTIMONIES FROM HISTORY** (from A. W. Pink, *The Christian in Romans 7*)

**Mr. Bradford**, of holy memory, who was martyred in the reign of bloody queen Mary, in a letter to a fellow-prisoner in another penitential, subscribed himself thus: ***“The sinful John Bradford: a very painted hypocrite: the most miserable, hard-hearted,***

*and unthankful sinner, John Bradford.” (1555 A.D.)*

Godly **Rutherford** wrote, *“This body of sin and corruption embitters and poisons our enjoyment. Oh that I were where I shall sin no more.” (1650 A.D.)*

**Bishop Berkeley** wrote, *“I cannot pray, but I sin; I cannot preach, but I sin; I cannot administer, nor receive the holy sacrament, but I sin. My very repentance needs to be repented of: and the tears I shed need washing in the blood of Christ.” (1670 A.D.)*

Jonathan Edwards, in whose home died that remarkable man Mr. **David Brainerd** (the first missionary to the Indians, and whose devotion to Christ was witnessed to by all who knew him), and with whom he was intimately acquainted, says in his *“Memoirs of Mr. Brainerd,” “His religious illuminations, affections, and comfort, seemed to a great degree to be attended with evangelical humiliation; consisting in a sense of his own utter insufficiency, despicableness, and odiousness; with an answering disposition and frame of heart. How deeply affected was he almost continually with his great defects in religion; with his vast distance from that spirituality and holy frame of mind that become a child of God; with his ignorance, pride, deadness, barrenness! He was not only affected with the remembrance of his former sinfulness, before his conversion, but with the sense of his present vileness and pollution. He was not only disposed to think other saints better than he; yea to look on himself as the worst and least of saints; but, very often, as the vilest and worst of mankind.”*

**Jonathan Edwards** himself, than whom few men have been more honored of God, either in their spiritual attainments or in the extent to which God has used them in blessing to others, near the end of his life wrote thus: *“When I look into my heart and take a view of its wickedness, it looks like an abyss infinitely deeper than hell. And it appears to me, that, were it not for free grace, exalted and raised up to the infinite height of all the fulness and glory of the great Jehovah, I should appear sunk down in my sins below hell itself; far below the sight of everything, but the eye of sovereign grace, that alone can pierce down to such a depth. And it is affecting to think how ignorant I was, when a young Christian [alas, that so many older Christians are still ignorant of it.—A.W.P.], of the bottomless depths of wickedness, pride, hypocrisy and deceit left in my heart” (1743 A.D.).*

**Augustus Toplady**, author of *“Rock of Ages,”* wrote thus in his private diary under December 31, 1767 — *“Upon a review of the past year, I desire to confess that my unfaithfulness has been exceeding great; my sins still greater; God’s mercies greater than both.”* And again, *“My short-comings and my mis-doings, my unbelief and want of love, would sink me into the lowest hell, was not Jesus my righteousness and my Redeemer.”*

Listen to the words of that godly woman, the wife of that eminent missionary **A. Judson**: *“Oh how I rejoice that I am out of the whirlpool! Too gay, too trifling, for a missionary’s wife! That may be, but after all, gaiety is my lightest sin. It is my coldness of heart, my listlessness, my want of faith, my spiritual inefficiency and inertness, by love of self, the inherent and every-day pampered sinfulness of my nature, that makes me such a mere infant in the cause of Christ — not the attractions of the world.”*

**John Newton**, writer of that blessed hymn, *“Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me; I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see;”* when referring to the expectations which he cherished at the outset of his Christian life, wrote thus: *“But alas! these my golden expectations have been like South Sea dreams. I have lived hitherto a poor sinner, and I believe I shall die one. Have I, then, gained nothing? Yes, I have gained that which I once would rather have been without! Such accumulated proof of the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of my heart, as I hope by the Lord’s blessing has, in some measure, taught me to know what I mean when I say, Behold, I am vile ... I was ashamed of myself, when I began to seek it, I am more ashamed now.”*

**James Ingliss** (Editor of *Waymarks in the Wilderness*) at the close of his life, wrote Mr. J.H. Brookes, *“As I am brought to take a new view of the end, my life seems so made up of squandered opportunities, and so barren of results, that it is sometimes very painful; but grace comes in to meet it all, and He will be glorified in my humiliation also” (1872).* On which Mr. Brookes remarked, *“How like him, and how unlike the boastings of those who are glorying in their fancied attainments!”*

One more quotation: this time from a sermon by the late **C. H. Spurgeon**. Said the prince of preachers, *“There are some professing Christians who can speak of themselves in terms of admiration; but, from my inmost heart, I loathe such speeches more and more every day that I live. Those who talk in such a boastful fashion must be constituted very differently from me. While they are congratulating themselves, I have to lie humbly at the foot of Christ’s Cross, and marvel that I am saved at all, for I know that I am saved. I have to wonder that I do not believe Christ more, and equally wonder that I am privileged to believe in Him at all — to wonder that I do not love Him more, and equally to wonder that I love Him at all — to wonder that I am not holier, and equally to wonder that I have any desire to be holy at all considering what a polluted debased, depraved nature I find still within my soul, notwithstanding all that divine grace has done in me. If God were ever to allow the fountains of the great deeps of depravity to break up in the best man that lives, he would make as bad a devil as the devil himself is. I care nothing for what these boasters say concerning their own perfections; I feel sure that they do not know themselves, or they could not talk as they often do. There is tinder enough in the saint who is nearest to heaven to kindle another hell if God should but permit a spark to fall upon it. In the very best of men there is an infernal and well-nigh infinite depth of depravity. Some Christians never seem to find this out. I almost wish that they might not do so, for it is a painful discovery for anyone to make; but it has the beneficial effect of making us cease from trusting in ourselves, and causing us to glory only in the Lord.”*

**Additional comments from Robert Haldane:** *“On the whole, then, we here learn that the Apostle Paul, notwithstanding all the grace with which he was favored, found a principle of evil operating so strongly in his heart, that he denominates it a law always present and always active to retard him in his course. He was not, however, under its dominion. He was in Christ Jesus a new creature, born of God, renewed in the spirit of his mind. He delighted in the holy law of God in all its extent and spirituality, while at the same time he felt the influence of the other hateful principle — that tendency to evil which characterizes the old man, — which waged perpetual war against the work of grace in his soul, impelling him to the commission of sin, and constantly striving to bring him under its power. Nothing can more clearly demonstrate the fallen state of man, and the entire corruption of his nature, than the perpetual and irreconcilable warfare which that corruption maintains in the hearts of all believers against ‘the Divine nature’ of which they are made partakers; and nothing can more forcibly enhance the value of the Gospel, and prove its necessity in order to salvation, or more fully illustrate the great truth which Paul had been illustrating, that by the deeds of the law no flesh shall be justified in the sight of God...”*

“The conflict here described by Paul, his deep conviction of sin consisting with delight in the law of God, and this agreement of heart with its holy precepts, are peculiar to those only who are regenerated by the Spirit of God. They who know the excellence of that law, and earnestly desire to obey it, will feel the force of the Apostle’s language. It results from the degree of sanctification to which he had attained, from his hatred of sin and profound humility. This conflict was the most painful of his trials, compelling him in bitterness to exclaim, ‘O wretched man that I am!’ — an exclamation never wrung from him by all his multiplied persecutions and outward sufferings. The proof that from the 14<sup>th</sup> verse to the end of the chapter he relates his own experience at the time when he wrote this Epistle, is full and complete....

“Paul, in this chapter, contrasts his former with his present state. Formerly, when ignorant of the true import of the law, he entertained a high opinion of himself. ‘I was alive without the law once.’ Accordingly he speaks in other parts of his writings of his sincerity, his religious zeal, and his irreproachable moral conduct before his conversion. Afterwards, when the veil of self-delusion was removed, he discovered that he had been a blasphemer, a persecutor, injurious, and in unbelief; so that, when he was an Apostle, he calls himself the chief of sinners. If he owns convinced that he had been a sinner, condemned by the law, it was when the Lord Jesus was revealed to him; for till then he was righteous in his own esteem. Before that time he was dead in trespasses and sins, having nothing but his original corrupted nature, which he calls sin. He had no conviction that he was radically and practically a sinner, of which the passage before us proves he was now fully conscious. From this period, the flesh, or sin, which he elsewhere calls ‘the old man,’ remained in him. Though it harassed him much, he did not walk according to it; but, being now in the spirit, the new nature which he had received predominated. He therefore clearly establishes, in this chapter, the opposition between the old man and the working of the new nature. This is according to the uniform language of his Epistles, as well as of the whole of Scripture, both in its doctrinal and historical parts. In consistency with this, he exhorts the saints at Ephesus to ‘put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;’ and calls on the *faithful brethren* at Colosse to mortify their members which are upon the earth. All his instructions to ‘*them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus*’ proceed on the same principle. And why were they cautioned by him even against the grossest sins, but because there was still in them a principle disposed to every sin? ...

“All that Paul says in this chapter concerning himself and his inward corruption, entirely corresponds with what we are taught both in the Old Testament and the New respecting the people of God. ***The piety and devotedness to God of the holiest men did not prevent the evil that was in them from appearing in many parts of their conduct; while at the same time we are informed of the horror they expressed on account of their transgressions.*** God declares that there was no man like Job on the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feared God and eschewed evil; and by God Himself Job is classed with two others of His most eminent saints, Ezekiel 14:14. Yet Job exclaims, ‘Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer Thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth.’ ‘I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth Thee: wherefore I abhor myself in dust and ashes,’ Job 40:4, 42:5, 6. ‘My soul,’ says the Psalmist, in the same Psalm in which he so often asserts that he delights in the law of God, — ‘my soul cleaveth unto the dust;’ while in the preceding sentence he had declared, ‘Thy testimonies also are my delight:’ and again, ‘I will delight myself in Thy commandments, which I have loved;’ ‘O how I love Thy law! it is my meditation all the day;’ ‘My soul hath kept Thy testimonies; and I love them exceedingly;’ yet he says, ‘Mine iniquities are gone over my head as an heavy burden; they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink and are corrupt, because of my foolishness;’ ‘My loins are filled with a loathsome disease, and there is no soundness in my flesh;’ ‘My groaning is nothing from Thee;’ ‘I will declare mine iniquity.’ Yet in the same Psalm David says, ‘In Thee, O Lord, do I hope.’ ‘They also that render evil for good are mine adversaries, because I follow the thing that is good. Make haste to help me, O Lord my salvation.’ ‘Iniquities,’ he says, ‘prevail against me,’ while he rejoices in the forgiveness of his sins. ‘Pardon mine iniquity, for it is great.’

“‘Woe is me,’ exclaims the Prophet Isaiah, ‘for I am a man of unclean lips,’ Isaiah 6:5. ‘Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?’ Proverbs 20:9. God promised to establish an everlasting covenant with Israel, Ezekiel 16:63; and the consequence was to be, that they should loathe themselves and be confounded when God was pacified towards them. The complaints of the servants of God all proceeded from the same source, namely, their humiliating experience of indwelling sin, at the same time that, after the inward man, they *delighted* in the law of God. And could it be otherwise in men who, by the Spirit of God, were convinced of sin? John 16:8. There is not a man on earth that *delights* in the law of God who does not know that his soul *cleaveth unto the dust*. Comparing himself with the law of God, Paul might well lament his remaining corruption, as the Apostle Peter, experiencing the same consciousness of his sinfulness, exclaims, ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord;’

or as the Apostle James confesses, *'In many things we all offend.'* Both Peter and James here declare that they themselves, although Apostles of Christ, had sin in them. Was then Paul an exception to this? and if he had sin, is it not a just account of it, when he says that there was a law within him warring against the law of his mind; in short, a contest between what he elsewhere calls the new and the old man? If, on the other hand, on account of anything done either by him or in him, of any zeal, excellency, or attainment, Paul, or any man, should fancy himself in a state of sinless perfection, the Holy Ghost, by the mouth of the Apostle John, charges him with self-deception. *'If we' (Apostle or others) 'say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us,'* 1 John 1:8. Whence, then, is there any difficulty in admitting that in the account of the internal struggle in the passage before us, Paul described his own warfare with indwelling sin, or that it portrays a state of mind incompatible with that of an Apostle? Did Paul's sanctification differ in kind from that of other believers, so as to render this incredible, or, in as far as it may have exceeded that of most other believers, did it differ only in degree? There is then no ground whatever for denying that he here related his own personal experience, according to the plain literal, and obvious import of the expressions he employs. Were Paul, when judged at the tribunal of God, to take his stand on the best action he ever performed in the midst of his apostolic labors, he would be condemned forever. Imperfection would be found to cleave to the very best of his services; and imperfection, even in the least possible degree, as it respects the law of God, is sin. *'Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them.'* And who is the mere man that, since the fall, came up for one moment to the standard of this holy law, which says, *'Thou shalt love the Lord with all thy heart?'* ...

"In Mr. Toplady's works it is stated that some of Dr. Doddridge's last words were, *'The best prayer I ever offered up in my life deserves damnation.'* In this sentiment **Dr. Doddridge** did not in the smallest degree exceed the truth. And with equal truth Mr. Toplady says of himself, *'Oh that ever such a wretch as I should be tempted to think highly of himself! I that am of myself nothing but sin and weakness. In whose flesh naturally dwells no good thing; I who deserve damnation for the best work I ever performed,'* vol. 4:171, and 1-41. These are the matured opinions concerning themselves of men who had been taught by the same Spirit as the Apostle Paul.

"Every man who knows 'the plague of his own heart,' whatever may be the view he has taken of this passage, *knows for certain* that even if the Apostle Paul has not given here an account of his own experience at the time when he wrote this Epistle *such was actually the Apostle's experience day by day.* He also knows that the man who is not daily constrained to cry out to himself, *'O wretched man that I am,'* from a sense of his indwelling corruption and his shortcomings, *is not a Christian.* He has not been convinced of sin by the spirit of God; he is not one of those who, like the Apostle Paul, are forced to confess, *'We that are in this tabernacle do groan,'* 2 Corinthians 5:2, 4; or to say, *'We ourselves also which have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves, groan within ourselves,'* Romans 8:23. The Apostle's exclamation in the passage before us, *'O wretched man that I am,'* is no other than this *groaning.* ***And every regenerate man, the more he is convinced of sin, which in his natural state never disturbed his thoughts, the more he advances in the course of holiness, and the more nearly he approaches to the image of his Divine Master, the more deeply will he groan under the more vivid conception and the stronger abhorrence of the malignity of his indwelling sin.*** It is easy to see how suitable it was that the author of this Epistle should detail his own experience, and thus describe the internal workings of his heart, and not merely refer to his external conduct. He speaks of himself, that it might not be supposed that the miserable condition he described did not concern believers; and to prove that the most holy ought to humble themselves before God, since God would find in them a body of sin and death; guilty, as in themselves, of eternal death. Nothing, then, could serve more fully to illustrate his doctrine in the preceding part of it, respecting human depravity and guilt, and the universality of the inveterate malady of sin, than to show that it was capable, even in himself, with all the grace of which he was so distinguished a subject, of opposing with such force the principles of the new life in his soul. In this view, the passage before us perfectly accords with the Apostle's design in this chapter, in which, for the comfort of believers, he is testifying that by their marriage with Christ they are *dead to the law,* as he had taught in the preceding chapter that by union with Him in His death and resurrection they are *dead to sin,* which amounts to the same thing. As, in the concluding part of that chapter, he had shown by his exhortations to duty, that, by affirming that they were dead to sin he did not mean that they were exempt from its commission, so, in the concluding part of this chapter, he shows, by detailing his own experience, that he did not mean that by their being dead to the law they were exempt from its violation. In one word, while, by both of these expressions, dead to sin, and dead to the law, he intended to teach that their justification was complete, he proves, by what he says in the concluding parts of both chapters, that their sanctification was incomplete. And as, referring to himself personally, he proves the incompleteness of the *sanctification* of believers, by looking forward to a future period of deliverance, saying, *'Who shall deliver me?'* so, referring to himself personally in the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> verse of the next chapter, he proves the completeness of their *justification* by speaking of his deliverance in respect to it as past, saying, *'The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.'*

"The view which the Apostle here gives of his own experience clearly demonstrates that the pain experienced by believers in their internal conflicts is quite compatible with the blessed and consolatory assurance of eternal Life. This he also proves in those passages above quoted, 2 Corinthians 5:1, *'We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this (tabernacle) we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house, which is from heaven.'* And in chapter 8:23, where he says, *'Ourselves also which have the first fruits of the Spirit; even we ourselves groan within ourselves.'*

"It was, then, to confirm the faith of the disciples, and furnish a living exhibition of their spiritual conflict, that Paul here lays open



his own heart, and discloses the working of those two warring principles, which to a greater or less extent contend for the mastery in the bosom of every child of God. Every perversion, then, of this highly important part of the Divine testimony ought to be most strenuously opposed. It is not an insulated passage; it contains the clear development of a great general principle which belongs to the whole of Divine revelation, and is essential to its truth, — a principle of the utmost importance in Christian experience. ‘Blessed be God,’ says Mr. Romaine, ‘for the seventh chapter of the Romans.’

“The wisdom discovered in making the present experience of Paul the object of contemplation, ought to awaken in our hearts feelings of the liveliest gratitude. Had we been presented with a spectacle of the internal feelings of one less eminently holy, the effect would have been greatly weakened. But when this Apostle, whose life was spent in laboring for the glory of God; when he, whose blameless conduct was such as to confound his enemies who sought occasion against him; when he, who finished his course with joy, having fought a good fight, and kept the faith; when he, whose conscience enabled him to look back with satisfaction on the past, and forward with joy to the future; when he, who stood ready to receive the crown of righteousness which, by the eye of faith, he beheld laid up for him in heaven, — when one so favored, so distinguished, as the great Apostle of the Gentiles, is himself constrained, in turning his eye inward upon the rebellious strivings of his old nature, to cry out, ‘*O wretched man that I am!*’ — what a wonderful exhibition do we behold of the malignity of that sin, which has so deeply poisoned and corrupted our original nature, that death itself is needful in order to sever its chains and destroy its power in the soul!

*“This passage, then, is peculiarly fitted to comfort those who are oppressed with a sense of indwelling sin in the midst of their spiritual conflicts, unknown to all except themselves and the Searcher of hearts. There may be some believers, who, not having examined it with sufficient care, or being misled by false interpretations, mistake its natural and obvious meaning, and fear to apply the words which it contains to Paul as an Apostle. When these shall have viewed this portion of the Divine word in its true light, they will bless God for the instruction and consolation it is calculated to afford; while the whole of the representation, under this aspect, will appear foolishness to all who are Christians only in name, and who never experienced in themselves that internal conflict which the Apostle here describes. It is a conflict from which not one of the people of God, since the fall of the first man, was ever exempted, — a conflict which He alone never experienced who is called ‘the Son of the Highest,’ of whom, notwithstanding, it has of late been impiously affirmed that He also was subjected to it. [Haldane, Romans, pg 300ff]*

## ROMANS 7:7-12

*What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me. Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. (Rom 7:7-12 KJV)*

*What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, “Do not covet.” But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead. Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good. (Rom 7:7-12 NIV)*

*What, then, shall we say? the law [is] sin? let it not be! but the sin I did not know except through law, for also the covetousness I had not known if the law had not said: ‘Thou shalt not covet;’ and the sin having received an opportunity, through the command, did work in me all covetousness — for apart from law sin is dead. And I was alive apart from law once, and the command having come, the sin revived, and I died; and the command that [is] for life, this was found by me for death; for the sin, having received an opportunity, through the command, did deceive me, and through it did slay [me]; so that the law, indeed, [is] holy, and the command holy, and righteous, and good. (Rom 7:7-12 Young’s Literal Translation)*

*“This paragraph has two purposes: to exonerate the law from the charge that it is sinful and to delineate more carefully the true relationship among sin, the law, and death. Paul takes care of the first of these purposes at both ‘ends’ of the paragraph: in v. 7a, with the rhetorical question followed by his characteristic strong negative, and in v. 12, with a closing assertion. Between these, Paul cares for his other main purpose. He admits that, though the law is not ‘sin,’ it does have a close relationship to sin. For the law brings recognition of sin and even stimulates sinning (vv. 7b-8). In fact, alluding, as we have seen, to his and other Jews’ solidarity with the people of Israel at Sinai, he argues that the coming of the law brought a ‘radicalizing’ of the sentence of condemnation (vv. 9-10a). Strangely, then, the very commandment that was ‘unto life’ became an instrument of death (v. 10b). Verse 11 summarizes: sin has the used the law as a ‘bridgehead’ to deceive and condemn.” [Moo, Romans, pg 432]*

**bridgehead** — noun: a forward position seized by advancing troops in enemy territory as a foothold for further advance

**v 7 — IS THE LAW SINFUL? —** “‘What then shall we say?’ brings us back to the dialogical style of 6:1-23. As there, *the question raised here reflects a criticism of Paul’s gospel that he must often have heard. If Paul teaches that the law ‘increases the trespass’ (5:20) and ‘arouses sinful passions’ (7:5), he must believe that the law is by its nature evil and sinful. Should Paul hold such a view, he would effectively destroy any continuity between the law and his gospel, between the OT and the NT, between Moses and Christ. Indeed, many Jews and Jewish Christians accused Paul of holding just such an opinion. Paul is undoubtedly aware that such charges against him have reached the ears of the Roman Christians; so, to prepare the way for his visit and the enlistment of the Romans in his missionary efforts, he seeks here to dispel any such apprehensions. ‘Is the law sin? By no means!’*” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 432]

**WHILE NOT SINFUL IN ITSELF, THE LAW AND SIN HAS A DEFINITE RELATIONSHIP —** “But Paul’s rejection of the equation between the law and sin does not mean that he is taking back what he had said earlier (e.g., 5:20; 7:5) — the law *has* become allied with sin. This relationship he reaffirms and further explains in what follows. The ‘but’ that introduces this discussion is therefore not strictly adversative — ‘no, the law is not sin; on the contrary...’ — but restrictive — ‘no, the law is not sin, although it is true that ...’. *Although the law is not itself sin, the law and sin do have a definite relationship.* Specifically, according to v. 7b, the law brings ‘knowledge’ of sin. Paul first states this relationship in a general assertion — ‘I would not have known sin except through the law’ — then adduces a specific example — ‘I would not have known covetousness if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.”’” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 432f] “*Nay, I had not known sin* — The word translated ‘nay’ means more properly ‘but;’ and this would have more correctly expressed the sense, ‘I deny that the Law is sin. My doctrine does not lead to that; nor do I affirm that it is evil. I strongly repel the charge; BUT, notwithstanding this, I still maintain that it had an effect in exciting sins, yet so as that I perceived that the Law itself was good;’ Romans 7:8-12. At the same time, therefore, that the Law must be admitted to be the occasion of exciting sinful feelings, by crossing the inclinations of the mind, yet the fault was not to be traced to the Law.” [Barne’s *Notes on the Bible: Romans*] “The law is the straight edge which determines the quantum of obliquity in the crooked line to which it is applied. It is natural for man to do what is unlawful, and to desire especially to do that which is forbidden. The heathens have remarked this propensity in man. Thus LIVY, xxxiv. 4: — ‘Luxury, like a wild beast, is irritated by its very bonds.’ ‘The presumptuous human race obstinately rush into prohibited acts of wickedness.’ HOR. Carm. lib. i. Od. iii. ver. 25. And OVID, Amor. lib. ii. Eleg. xix. ver. 3: — ‘What is lawful is insipid; the strongest propensity is excited towards that which is prohibited.’ And again, Ib. lib. iii. E. iv. ver. 17: — ‘Vice is provoked by every strong restraint, Sick men long most to drink, who know they mayn’t.’ The same poet delivers the same sentiment in another place: — ‘Being admonished, he becomes the more obstinate; and his fierceness is irritated by restraints. Prohibitions become incentives to greater acts of vice.’ But it is needless to multiply examples; this most wicked principle of a sinful, fallen nature, has been felt and acknowledged by ALL mankind.” [Adam Clarke, *Romans*]

**known sin ... known lust —** both are in the indicative tense, a statement of fact, followed by an “*if not*” construction. Some therefore render this “*I would not have known ...*”. There is also a change in the verbs used, which some give some importance. “In classical Greek, οἶδα [oida] and γινώσκω [ginōskō] are generally distinguished, the former meaning ‘to perceive, know intuitively,’ and the latter ‘come to understand through experience.’ If this distinction is preserved here, the first sentence would connote ‘an intimate experimental acquaintance’ with sin, the second ‘simple knowledge that there was such a thing as lust.’ But the context would lead us to expect, if anything, just the reverse emphasis: a general statement regarding the way the law brings ‘knowledge’ of sin, followed by an example of ‘coming to know and experience’ a specific sin.” [Moo, *Romans*, gp 433] Moo continues to bring forth support from others that the verbs used in this sentence do not always retain their classical Greek differences within the NT.

#### **WHAT DOES PAUL MEAN BY “KNOWING SIN”? —**

- know = defining sin: through the law came the revelation of the righteous standard of God, therefore I came to know certain acts were sinful; e.g., my inner desire to possess is nothing but coveting that is prohibited by God.
- per Moo: undoubtedly the first point is true but Paul implies such knowledge available without the Mosaic law, 1:32; 2:14-16. Moo thinks the context that the law reveals sin to be “sin” and renders sin “utterly sinful” – v. 13 – suggests a stronger nuance: through the law I come to recognize or understand the real nature and power of sin. The law, by branding “sin” as transgression (cf. 4:15; 5:13-14) and bringing wrath and death (4:15; 7:8-11,13), unmasks sin in its true colors.
- going a step further, we proceed from a mere intellectual understanding to actual experience: through the law I have come to experience sin for what it really is. Through the law sin “worked in me” all kinds of sinful desires (v. 8), and through the law sin “came to life” and brought death (vv. 9-11). It is through this actual experience of sin, then, that I come to understand the real “sinfulness” of sin.

*“The kind of knowledge of which the apostle speaks is not mere intellectual cognition, but also conviction. It includes the consciousness of guilt and pollution. The law awakened in him the knowledge of his own state and character. He felt himself to be a sinner; and by a sinner is to be understood not merely a transgressor, but one in whom sin dwells. It was the corruption of his nature which was revealed to the apostle by the operation of the law.”* [Hodge, *Romans*, pg 222] “Paul does not say that he would not have been a sinner without the law, but that he would not have known sin as now he knew it, or have seen himself to be a sinner. Now, though no man is without sin, yet a proud Pharisee might think himself free from sin by his keeping the law, when he did not look to it as extending to the thoughts of the heart. Paul, referring to his state before his conversion, says that, touching the righteousness of the law he was blameless, Philippians 3:6; and it was only when he understood the law in its full

extent, that he became self-condemned.” [Haldane, *Romans*, pg 285]

**lust, coveting** — this should be understood as more than mere sexual desires (which is our common connotation today). *Paul uses this word to encompass sinful desires of every kind*: “The Greek verb is ἐπιθυμέω [epithumeō], which Paul nowhere else uses to describe sexual desire as such (13:9; 1 Cor 10:6; Gal 5:17; 1 Tim 3:1). And only three of his seventeen uses of the cognate noun ἐπιθυμία [epithumia] outside this context focus on sexual desire (1:24; 2 Tim 2:22; 3:6).” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 434] *“The original word for lust signifies strong desire, whether good or bad. Here it is used in as bad sense. It is that disposition by which we are inclined to evil, — the habit and inclination to sin, and not merely the acts which proceed from it.”* [Haldane, *Romans*, pg 285]

**“Do not covet”** — Paul’s example given is almost certainly an abbreviated version of the tenth commandment (Ex 20:17; Deut 5:21). “The citation of the prohibition of coveting in general (without naming the objects of the coveting) has Jewish antecedents, where it stands as a representative summation of the Mosaic law (Jewish writers could do this because they tended to view ‘coveting’ as the root of all sins.). This, rather than any personal reasons (for which there is no evidence elsewhere), may be why Paul cites the commandment.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 435]

**v 8 — THE LAW “AGITATES” SIN** — “The first sentence in v. 8 elaborates v. 7c. *Not only has the commandment ‘Do not covet’ brought ‘me’ to see the true nature of ‘desire,’ but sin has taken advantage of the ‘opportunity’ afforded ‘through the commandment’ to produce ‘all kinds of coveting’ in me. The law is not ‘sin,’ nor the originator of sin, but the occasion or operating base that sin has used to accomplish its evil and deadly purpose. Paul again personifies sin, picturing it as a ‘power’ that works actively and purposefully (cf. Gen 4:7).* Paul uses ‘commandment’ instead of ‘law’ (nomos; cf. v. 7) because he is referring to the single commandment he cited in v. 7, but the commandment represents the Mosaic law as a whole. *Paradoxically, what sin produces by taking advantage of the commandment is just what the commandment prohibited: ‘all kinds of coveting.’ But how is it that the law can give sin the occasion to stir up all these desires? To some extent, the old adage about ‘forbidden fruits’ can explain what Paul means: people, told not to do something, immediately conclude that there must be something ‘fun’ about it and are motivated all the more, or even perhaps for the first time, to do it. Ancient moralists noted this phenomenon, and we are all familiar with it; witness the result of a parent telling her child, ‘Now do not go outside and jump in that mud puddle!’” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 435f] “In his rich allegory Pilgrim’s Progress, John Bunyan paints a vivid word picture of sin’s arousal by the law. A large, dustcovered room in Interpreter’s house symbolizes the human heart. When a man with a broom, representing God’s law, begins to sweep, the dust swirls up and all but suffocates Christian. That is what the law does to sin. It so agitates sin that it becomes stifling. And just as a broom cannot clean a room of dust but only stir it up, so the law cannot cleanse the heart of sin but only make the sin more evident and unpleasant.” [MacArthur, *Romans 1-8*, pg 372]*

**THE LAW “ACTIVATES” SIN** — “The last sentence of the verse initiates a sequence of clauses (vv. 8b-10a) in which Paul explains the way in which the law has become the ‘occasion’ for the activity of sin. Paul constructs this sequence in a chiasmic pattern, in which he portrays ‘dead’ sin coming to ‘life’ at the same moment as the ‘living’ ‘I’ ‘dies’:

<i>‘Apart from the Law’</i>	<i>‘When the Commandment came’</i>
‘sin is <i>dead</i> ’ (v. 8c)	‘sin spring to <i>life</i> again’ (v. 9b)
‘I was <i>alive</i> ’ (v. 9a)	‘I <i>died</i> ’ (v. 10a)

[Moo, *Romans*, pg 436f]

**opportunity** — ἀφορμή [aphormē] (cf. also v. 11) “This word perfectly conveys the role that Paul assigns to the law in these verses. It refers often to the ‘base of operations,’ or ‘bridgehead,’ required for successful military operations. Unfortunately, we cannot be sure that this nuance clings to the word here since it is used in many different contexts (see the other NT uses: 2 Cor 5:12; 11:12 [twice]; Gal 5:13; 1 Tim 5:14; Luke 11:54). But the idea, generally, of ‘occasion’ or ‘starting point’ still makes the point very well.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 435] *“Occasion* — Emphatic, expressing the relation of the law to sin. The law is not sin, but sin found *occasion* in the law. Used only by Paul. See 2 Corinthians 5:12; Galatians 5:13; 1 Timothy 5:14. The verb ἀφορμάω [aphormaō] means *to make a start from a place*. Ἀφορμή [aphormē] is therefore primarily *a starting-point, a base of operations*. The Lacedaemonians agreed that Peloponnesus would be ἀφορμὴν ἱκανήν [aphormēn hikanēn] *a good base of operations* (Thucydides, i., 90). Thus, *the origin, cause, occasion, or pretext* of a thing; *the means with which one begins*. Generally, resources, as means of war, capital in business. Here the law is represented as furnishing sin with the material or ground of assault, ‘the fulcrum for the energy of the evil principle.’ Sin took the law as a base of operations.” [Vincent, *Word Studies*, vol 3 pg 78]

**all manner of coveting** — πάσαν ἐπιθυμίαν [pasan epithumian] “As in v. 7, ἐπιθυμία [epithumia] means sinful ‘desire,’ ‘covetousness’ (RSV) — ‘lust’ not being a good translation because we tend to confine the word to sexual desire. The lack of any object after ἐπιθυμία [epithumia] — as with ἐπιθυμέω [epithumeō] in v. 7 — shows that Paul’s focus is on the sinful propensity to ‘covet’ per se; and the addition of the word πάσαν [pasan] lends a qualitative nuance: ‘every manner of coveting.’ *Whatever human beings might see and want selfishly for themselves is included: prominence, wealth, power, possessions. Perhaps, indeed, we should include in this list that illicit desire which is at the root of all others — the desire to ‘be like God,’ to usurp the place of the Creator.*” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 436] *“All manner of* — Greek, ‘All desire.’ Every species of unlawful desire. It was not confined to one single desire, but extended to everything which the Law declared to be wrong.” [Barne’s *Notes on the Bible*:



**“SIN IS DEAD” APART FROM THE LAW** — Sin being ‘dead’ is therefore, not that it didn’t exist, but that it was not as active or powerful before the law. *“To say that a thing is dead, is to say that it is inactive, unproductive, and unobserved. All this may be said of sin prior to the operation of the law. It is comparatively inoperative and unknown, until aroused and brought to light by the law.* There are two effects of the law included in this declaration — the excitement of evil passions, and the discovery of them.... The law then is not evil, but it produces the conviction of sin, by teaching us what sin is, ver. 7, and by making us conscious of the existence and power of this evil in our own hearts, ver. 8.... Such is certainly the experience of Christians. They live at ease. Conscience is at rest. They think themselves to be as good as can be reasonably required of them. They have no adequate conception of the power or heinousness of the evil within them. Sin lies, as it were, dead, as the torpid serpent, until the operation of the law rouses it from its slumbers, and reveals its character.” [Hodge, *Romans*, pg 224] “Every Christian knows by experience the truth of all the Apostle declares in this verse. He knows that, as soon as his eyes were opened to discover the spirituality of the law, he discerned in himself the fearful working of that corruption in his heart, which, not being perceived before, had given him no uneasiness. He knows that this corruption was even increased in violence by the discovery of the strictness of the law, which makes not the smallest allowance for sin, but condemns it in its root, and in its every motion. ‘The wicked nature,’ says Luther, ‘cannot bear either the good, or the demands of the law; as a sick man is indignant when he is desired to do all that a man in health can do.’ Such is the effect of the law when the eyes of the understanding are first opened by the Spirit of God. A power, formerly latent and inefficacious, then appears on a sudden to have gathered strength, and to stand up in order to oppress and defeat the purposes of the man, who hitherto was altogether unconscious of the existence in himself of such evils as those which he now perceives.” [Haldane, *Romans*, pg 286]

**SIN IS NOT ONLY AN ACTION BUT AN INWARD PRINCIPLE** — “By sin, in this case, cannot be understood actual sin. It must mean indwelling sin, or corruption of nature; sin as the principle or source of action, and not as an act.... [F]rom sin immanent in our nature, comes first desire, and then the act.... Such is plainly the meaning of the apostle. There is a principle of sin, a corruption of nature which lies back of all conscious voluntary exercises, to which they owe their origin. [Feelings of covetousness], the first form in which sin is revealed in the consciousness, springs from [sin]. This is a truth of great importance. According to the theology and religious conviction of the apostle, *sin can be predicated not only of acts, but also of inward states.*” [Hodge, *Romans*, pg 224]

**v 9** — “The law not only reveals and arouses sin but also ruins and destroys the sinner. Still recounting his own experience before salvation, Paul confesses that he had long been *‘alive apart from the law.’* As a highly-trained and zealous Pharisee, he was certainly not *‘apart from the law’* in the sense of not knowing or being concerned about it. He was an expert on the law and considered himself to be blameless in regard to it, thus thinking he lived a life that pleased God (Phil. 3:6). But throughout all his years of proud self-effort, Paul had served only the ‘oldness of the letter’ of the law (Rom. 7:6). *‘But when’* a true understanding of *‘the commandment came,’* he began to see himself as he really was and began to understand how far short he came of the law’s righteous standards. His sin then *‘became alive,’* that is, he came to realize his true condition in its full evil and destructiveness. On the other hand, he *‘died’* in the sense of his realizing that all his religious accomplishments were spiritual rubbish (Phil. 3:7-8). His self-esteem, self-satisfaction, and pride were devastated and in ruins. Paul *‘died.’* That is, for the first time, he realized he was spiritually dead. When he saw the majesty and holiness of God’s perfect law, he was broken and contrite. He was finally ready to plead with the penitent tax-gatherer, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’ (Luke 18:13). He recognized himself as one of the helpless and ungodly for whom Christ had died.” [MacArthur, *Romans 1-8*, pg 372f]

“The meaning of this clause is necessarily determined by what precedes. If by sin being dead means its lying unnoticed and unknown, then by *being alive*, Paul must mean that state of security and comparative exemption from the turbulence or manifestation of sin in his heart, which he then experienced. He fancied himself in a happy and desirable condition. He had no dread of punishment, no painful consciousness of sin. *But when the commandment came*, i.e. came to his knowledge, was revealed to him in its authority and in the extent and spirituality of its demands, *sin revived*; i.e. it was roused from its torpor. It was revealed in his consciousness by its greater activity; so that the increase of his knowledge of sin was due to an increase in its activity. *And I died.* As by being alive was meant being at ease in a fancied state of security and goodness, being dead must mean just the opposite, viz. a state of misery arising from a sense of danger and the consciousness of guilt. This interpretation is recommended not only by its agreement with the whole context, but also from its accordance with the common experience of Christians. Every believer can adopt the language of the apostle. He can say he was alive without the law; he was secure and free from any painful consciousness of sin; but when the commandment came, when he was brought to see how holy and how broad is the law of God, sin was aroused and revealed, and all his fancied security and goodness disappeared. He was bowed down under the conviction of his desert of death as a penalty, and under the power of spiritual death in his soul.” [Hodge, *Romans*, pg 224]

*“Without the law once* — Was Paul ever without the law? He was in ignorance of it till his conversion; and this he here calls being without the law. He was ignorant of its spirituality, and consequently had no true discernment of his innate corruption.... *When the commandment came* — That is, when he understood the true import of the commandment as forbidding the desire of anything prohibited by the law. He had heard and studied it before in its letter; but never till then did it come in its full extent and power to his conscience. All men know that, to a certain extent, they are sinners; but from this passage and its context, in which the Apostle gives an account of his own experience both in his unconverted and renewed state, we learn that unconverted men do not perceive



the sin that is in them in its root, called, in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> verses, ‘lust’ or ‘concupiscence.’ This is only felt and known when, by the Holy Spirit, a man is *convinced of sin* — when, as it is here said, the commandment comes — when it comes to him with power, so that he perceives its real extent and spiritual import. He then discerns sin, not only in its various ramifications and actings, both internal and external, but also sees that it is inherent in him, and that in his flesh dwells no good thing; that he is not only by nature a sinner and an enemy to God, but that he is *without strength*, Romans 5:6, entirely unable to deliver himself from the power of sin, and that this can only be effected by the Spirit of God, by whom he is at the same time convinced of the righteousness of God — that righteousness which has been provided for those who are destitute in themselves of all righteousness. *Sin revived* — It was, in a manner, dead before, dormant, and unobserved. Now that the law was understood, it was raised to new life, and came to be perceived as living and moving. The contrast is with sin as dead, without the understanding of the law.... *I died* — That is, I saw myself dead by the law, as far as my own observance of the law was concerned. All Paul’s hopes, founded on what he was in himself, were destroyed, and he discovered that he was a sinner condemned by the law; so that the law which promised life to those who observed it, to which he had looked for justification, he now saw subjected him to death.... Thus Paul was without the law during all that time when he profited in the Jews’ religion above many of his equals, when, according to the straightest sect of their religion, he lived a Pharisee, and when, as touching the law, according to the common estimation, he was blameless. He was without the true knowledge of it and its spiritual application to his heart; but, in his own esteem, he was *alive*. He was confident of the Divine favor. Sin lay as dead in his heart. He could therefore go about to establish his own righteousness. He had not found the law to be a ‘killing letter,’ working wrath; so far from it, he could make his boast of the law, and assume it as the ground of his rejoicing before God. But when the commandment came, sin revived, and he died. Such is the account which Paul now gives of himself, who declared, Acts 22:3, that formerly he had been, and, as he affirms in the beginning of the tenth chapter of this Epistle, that the unconverted Jews still were, ‘zealous towards God.’” [Haldane, *Romans*, pg 287]

**“I” WAS ALIVE** — “In this time, ‘apart from the law,’ the egō was ‘living.’ Only if egō designates Adam can this verb be given full theological meaning — ‘spiritual’ life — but we have seen that the identification of egō with Adam is unlikely. Therefore ‘was living’ must be given a milder meaning: either a relative theological sense — compared to the seriousness of ‘my’ situation after the law, I was ‘living before it — or a purely prosaic meaning — ‘I was existing.’” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 437] “*I was alive — once*. Referring to the time of childlike innocence previous to the stimulus imparted to the inactive principle of sin by the coming of the law; when the moral self-determination with respect to the law had not taken place, and the sin-principle was therefore practically dead.” [Vincent, *Word Studies*, vol 3 pg 78]

**revived** — “Not *came to life*, but *lived again*. See Luke 15:24, 32. The power of sin is *originally* and *in its nature* living; but before the coming of the commandment its life is not expressed. When the commandment comes, it becomes alive again. It lies dormant, like the beast at the door (Genesis 4:7), until the law stirs it up. The tendency of prohibitory law to provoke the will to resistance is frequently recognized in the classics. Thus, Horace: ‘The human race, presumptuous to endure all things, rushes on through forbidden wickedness’ (Ode, i., 3, 25). Ovid: ‘The permitted is unpleasing; the forbidden consumes us fiercely’ (‘Amores,’ i., 19, 3). ‘We strive against the forbidden and ever desire what is denied’ (Id., i., 4, 17). Seneca: ‘Parricides began with the law, and the punishment showed them the crime’ (‘De Clementia,’ i., 23).” [Vincent, *Word Studies*, vol 3 pg 79]

**v 10** — Even as sin gained new life, however, egō ‘died.’ For “autobiographical Paul”, this is generally taken as Paul describing his realization that he stood condemned [e.g., Calvin]; or some think he refers to the situation of helplessness under the power of sin that ensued with ‘the coming of the commandment’ [Lloyd-Jones].

**THE LAW, “ORDAINED TO LIFE”** — “[P]aul undoubtedly has in mind the tendency among some Jews to accord to the Mosaic law life-giving power. What Paul says in these verses confronts such notions head-on: the law has not restrained but stimulated ‘evil desire’ (vv. 7-8a); the law has not led to life but to ‘death’ (vv. 8b-10a).” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 438] While not referring directly to Adam, an allusion or parallel to Adam’s experience might be in Paul’s mind. Examples of the Jewish belief of the law giving life may be found as follows:

- In one tradition the giving of the law was said to have provided Israel with the chance to choose life; when they turned from the law, in the incident of the golden calf, they lost that opportunity for life.
- Another tradition has it that Israel’s “lust,” though not the Gentiles’, was taken away at Sinai; cf., e.g., *b. Qidd.* 30b: “Even so did the Holy One, blessed be he, speak unto Israel: ‘My children, I created the evil desire but I [also] created the torah as its antidote; if you occupy yourselves with the torah, you will not be delivered into its hands.’”
- “The commands were given only that men should live through them, not that men should die through them.” [*t. Shabb.* 15.17]
- “He bestowed knowledge upon them, and allotted to them the law of life” [Sir. 17:11]

**“But the notion that the law has life-giving potential is asserted in the OT itself. While God never intended the law to be a means of salvation, the law did come with promises of life for obedience (cf. Lev 18:5; Ps 19:7-10; Ezek 20:11; Luke 20:28). From these verses, it seems fair to conclude that the law would have given life had it been perfectly obeyed. In this sense the law ‘promises life,’ even though God did not give it with this intention — for he, of course, knew that the power of sin made it impossible for any human being to fulfill the law and so attain the promised life. Thus, although the commandment was ‘unto life,’ this same commandment ‘proved to be’ a cause of death for Israel.”** [Moo, *Romans*, pg 439]

**unto death** — “The law was ordained to life, but, through sin, it was found to be unto death. As soon, then, as it came home to his conscience, Paul found himself condemned by that law from which he had expected life, for, though it could not justify a sinner, it

was powerful to condemn him. It then destroyed all the hope he had founded on it, and showed him that he was obnoxious to the curse which it pronounces on all transgressors. The law, however, which was ordained to life, will at last be proved to have attained this object in all in whom it has been fulfilled, Romans 8:4, by Him who is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. All such shall, according to its original appointment, enjoy everlasting life.” [Haldane, *Romans*, pg 288]

**v 11** — “Paul now returns to the language of v. 8a. Again he claims that sin has used the commandment as a bridgehead and through that bridgehead has brought evil to the egō. In v. 8, however, Paul spoke of the law as instrumental in creating sinful impulses; here he shows it to have been used to ‘deceive’ and ‘kill.’” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 439f] Allusion here might be made to Adam since Paul uses the same word here for ‘deceive’ as in 2 Cor 11:13 and 1 Tim 2:14 to describe Eve’s deception by Satan. But at best I believe it to be an allusion, not the teaching of the passage.

**ISRAEL AND THE LAW?** — Moo thinks the ‘promise of life’ ‘deceived’ Israel into thinking the law could save. Not because obeying the law itself is sinful or worthy of death, but because the law could not be fulfilled. *This is in accord with the plan of God (cf. 5:20; Gal 3:19-26) whose ultimate intention was positive: being ‘bound under sin,’ sinners might learn to look to God and his promise of the Messiah for deliverance.*

**sin deceived me** — “*Deceit is one of sin’s most subtle and disastrous evils. A person who is ‘deceived’ into thinking he is acceptable to God because of his own merit and good works will see no need of salvation and no reason for trusting in Christ. It is doubtless for that reason that all false religions — including those that claim the name of Christ — in one way or another are built on a deceptive foundation of self-trust and self-effort. Self-righteousness is not righteousness at all but is the worst of sins. Both by the standard of the law and by the standard of grace, the very term self-contradiction is a self-contradiction.*” [MacArthur, *Romans 1-8*, pg 373f] “Sin *deceived* me, [exēpatēse]. The [ek] is intensive: *‘It completely deceived me, or disappointed my expectations.’* How? By leading the apostle to expect one thing, while he experienced another. He expected life, and found death. He expected happiness, and found misery; he looked for holiness, and found increased corruption. He fancied that by the law all these desirable ends could be secured, when its operation was discovered to produce the directly opposite effects. Sin therefore deceived by the commandment, and by it slew him, instead of its being to him the source of holiness and blessedness. *The reference is not to the promised joys of sin, which always mock the expectation and disappoint the hopes, but rather to the utter failure of the law to do what he expected from it. Such is the experience of every believer, in the ordinary progress of his inward life. He first turns to the law, to his own righteousness and strength, but he soon finds that all the law can do is only to aggravate his guilt and misery.*” [Hodge, *Romans*, pg 225]

**v 12** — “Having shown that the law is the innocent ‘cat’s paw’ of sin, Paul can now return and complete the point with which he began the paragraph. ‘Is the law sin? Of course not! [v. 7a] .... The law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good.’” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 440]

**SALVATION CANNOT BE EARNED NOR MERITED** — *These verses remind us salvation might never be obtained by the ‘law’ but only by casting ourselves on the grace and mercy of God in Christ. “Augustine says, ‘God commands what we cannot do that we may know what we ought to seek from him.’ And Calvin: ‘In the precepts of the law, God is but the rewarder of perfect righteousness, which all of us lack, and conversely, the severe judge of evil deeds. But in Christ his face shines, full of grace and gentleness, even upon us poor and unworthy sinners.’”* [Moo, *Romans*, pg 441]

**Holy, and righteous, and good** — “This is the conclusion to the query in verse 7. The commandment is God’s and so holy like Him, just in its requirements and designed for our good. *The modern revolt against law needs these words.*” [Robertson, *Word Pictures*, vol 4 pg 368] “*Holy* as God’s revelation of Himself; *just* (Rev., *righteous*) in its requirements, which correspond to God’s holiness; *good*, salutary, because of its end.” [Vincent, *Word Studies*, vol 3 pg 79]

**holy** — Paul is not describing the law’s demand for holiness but its origin — it was given by one who is in his nature ‘holy.’

**just** — the law, being holy, cannot be charged with anything wrong

**good** — denotes the nature of the law, attributing to it that ‘goodness’ which is characteristic, ultimately, of God alone.

“Although Robert Murray McCheyne died in 1843 at the age of thirty, he left God’s people a great treasure in his memoirs and other writings. In the poem ‘Jehovah Tsidkenu,’ which means, ‘The Lord Our Righteousness,’ he testifies:

*I once was a stranger to grace and to God,  
I knew not my danger, and felt not my load;  
Though friends spoke in rapture of Christ on the tree,  
Jehovah Tsidkenu was nothing to me.*

*I oft read with pleasure, to soothe or engage,  
Isaiah’s wild measure and John’s simple page;  
But even when they pictured the blood-sprinkled tree,  
Jehovah Tsidkenu seemed nothing to me.*

*Like tears from the daughters of Zion that roll,*

*I wept when the waters went over His soul,  
Yet thought not that my sins had nailed to the tree  
Jehovah Tsidkenu — 'twas nothing to me.*

*When free grace awoke me by light from on high,  
Then legal fears shook me, I trembled to die;  
No refuge, no safety in self could I see —  
Jehovah Tsidkenu my Savior must be.*

*My terrors all vanished before the sweet name;  
My guilty fear banished, with boldness I came  
To drink at the fountain, life-giving and free —  
Jehovah Tsidkenu is all things to me.*

*Jehovah Tsidkenu! My treasure and boast,  
Jehovah Tsidkenu! I ne'er can be lost;  
In Thee shall I conquer by flood and by field —  
My cable, my anchor, my breastplate and shield!*

*Even treading the valley, the shadow of death,  
This "watchword" shall rally my faltering breath;  
For while from life's fever my God sets me free,  
Jehovah Tsidkenu my death-song shall be.'*

McCheyne experienced the same conviction of sin as did the apostle Paul. When he saw himself in the full light of God's law, he realized he was ruined and dead and had no hope but in the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ." [MacArthur, *Romans 1-8*, pg 375f]

## **ROMANS 7:13-25**

*Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful. For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus*

*Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful. We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God — through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave*

*That which is good then, to me hath it become death? let it not be! but the sin, that it might appear sin, through the good, working death to me, that the sin might become exceeding sinful through the command, for we have known that the law is spiritual, and I am fleshly, sold by the sin; for that which I work, I do not acknowledge; for not what I will, this I practise, but what I hate, this I do. And if what I do not will, this I do, I consent to the law that [it is] good, and now it is no longer I that work it, but the sin dwelling in me, for I have known that there doth not dwell in me, that is, in my flesh, good: for to will is present with me, and to work that which is right I do not find, for the good that I will, I do not; but the evil that I do not will, this I practise. And if what I do not will, this I do, it is no longer I that work it, but the sin that is dwelling in me. I find, then, the law, that when I desire to do what is right, with me the evil is present, for I delight in the law of God according to the inward man, and I behold another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of the sin that [is] in my members. A wretched man I [am]! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death? I thank God — through Jesus Christ our Lord; so then, I myself indeed with the mind do*

*Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.* (Rom 7:13-25 KJV) *to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.* (Rom 7:13-25 NIV) *serve the law of God, and with the flesh, the law of sin.* (Rom 7:13-25 Young's Literal Translation)

*“As we approach this controversial paragraph, we must keep in mind that Paul’s focus is still on the Mosaic law. And what Paul says about the Mosaic law comes to much the same thing, whatever we decide about the identity and spiritual condition of the person whose situation is depicted in these verses. The law, Paul insists again, is God’s law (cf. vv. 22,25), ‘spiritual’ (v. 14a), ‘good’ (v. 16). Yet, because ‘I’ find myself to be a ‘prisoner’ of sin (v. 23), a situation from which only God in Christ can deliver me (v. 24; cf. 8:1-4). In these verses Paul shows again that the Mosaic law is impotent to rescue people from their sin. For the law informs us of our duties before God, but it does not give us the ability to fulfill those duties. As good as God’s law is, it encounters people when they are already ‘fleshly’ (v. 14b), indwelt by sin (vv. 17, 20). From this situation the law does not, and cannot, rescue us; on the contrary, it reveals the depth of the division in our beings, between willing and doing, the ‘mind’ and the ‘flesh’ (vv. 15-20, 25). Paul’s essential teaching about the inability of the Mosaic law to rescue sinful people from spiritual bondage is the same whether that bondage is the condition of the unregenerate person — who cannot be saved through the law — or that of the regenerate person — who cannot be sanctified and ultimately delivered from the influence of sin through the law. I emphasize this point both in order to get started in my exegesis with the right perspective and in order to relieve undecided exegetes of some degree of strain. One can preach this paragraph, in its basic intention, without even making a definite identification of the egō.” [Moo, Romans, pg 442f]*

**v 13 — TRANSITION VERSE** — Some attach this verse with vv. 7-12 since it summarizes the three main points Paul has made: the law is good, sin is made manifest through the law, and sin worked through the law to produce death. But this verse also contains a question and brief answer which is further explained in vv. 14-25.

**WE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR SIN** — While viewing this struggle with sin, this cannot be taken as an excuse for our own behavior. *“How was it possible for sin to use the law to bring death to ‘me’? Is ‘sin’ a power, outside a person, that can arbitrarily bring to pass so disastrous a state of affairs? Not at all, Paul affirms in vv. 14-20, for sin dwells ‘in me.’ ‘I’ am ultimately at fault; certainly not the law, not even sin. It is ‘me’ and my ‘carnality,’ my helplessness under sin, that enables sin to do what it does. ‘Sin’ has invaded my existence and made me a divided person, willing to do what God wants but failing to do so.” [Moo, Romans, pg 451]*

*“The question Paul asks here restates the basic objection of v. 7. How could ‘that which is good’ (= the commandment / law of v. 12) become the source of death? Does not the intimate involvement of the law in securing the death of egō reveal again its true nefarious nature? As in v. 7, Paul strongly repudiates any such idea: ‘By no means!’ But hasn’t Paul already answered this question? In a sense he has, and the explanation he gives in this verse does not really go beyond what he has already said about the relationship of sin, the law, and death in vv. 7-11. However, Paul’s return to the matter suggests that he is not yet fully satisfied with the answer he has given. Accordingly, he moves forward in vv. 14-25 to explain in detail the role of another key player in this drama: egō.” [Moo, Romans, pg 452]*

**but** — Paul sets forth a full contrast: *“this death is not at all the fault of the law; on the contrary, it is sin that is responsible.”*

**worked death by that which is good** — The ‘that which is good’ is the law and is not to blame for our condition. *“Continuing his main theme from vv. 7-11, Paul places full responsibility for the death of egō on sin, absolving the law from blame by making it an instrument (‘through the good’) used by sin.” [Moo, Romans, pg 452]*

**TWO PURPOSE CLAUSES** — *“The two purpose clauses state the divine and ultimately positive purpose behind sin’s destructive use of the law. The first restates the revelatory role of the law that Paul described in v. 7; in bringing death, sin has ‘been made manifest’ for what it really is — ‘sin.’ The second purpose clause elaborates the first. Sin is revealed ‘as sin’ in that the ‘commandment’ causes sin to become ‘exceedingly sinful.’ What Paul means, in light of Rom. 4:15, 5:13-14, and 5:20, is that the ‘good’ commandment of God, by strictly defining sin, turns sin into conscious and willful rebellion against God. Sin is always bad; but it becomes worse — even more ‘sinful’ — when it involves deliberate violation of God’s good will for his people. The law, by making sin even worse than before, reveals sin in its true colors.” [Moo, Romans, pg 452f]*

**v 14** — *“Paul now explains how it is that ‘sin’ has been able to ‘work death in “me” through that which is good’ (v. 13). This could happen, Paul asserts, because, while the law is indeed good and ‘spiritual,’ ‘I’ am ‘fleshly.’ Verses 15-25 justify and develop this statement about himself, concluding from his tragic inability to put into practice what he knows to be right (vv. 15-25) that he is controlled by an alien and negative force — ‘the law of sin’ (vv. 22-23). It is because of his captivity to the power of sin that the law can become the instrument of death.” [Moo, Romans, pg 453]*

**we know** — Paul breaks his pattern of using the first person singular (“I”), drawing the readers of the letter into the argument.

**the law is spiritual** — *“In calling the law ‘spiritual,’ Paul is asserting its divine origin. While the OT abounds in similar assertions of the holy origin and character of the law (cf., e.g., Ps 19:7-11), it is never called ‘spiritual.’ Paul has chosen this word in order to set up the strongest possible contrast between the ‘spiritual’ law and the ‘fleshly’ egō.” [Moo, Romans, pg 453]* *“This*



fundamental and important truth, that *the law is spiritual*, although, while in his unconverted state, he was ignorant of it, he now affirms that both he and they to whom he wrote knew it. It is a thing of which no Christian is ignorant. All Christians know it experimentally. They know it when the *commandment comes* to them, not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost; when, according to the promise of the new covenant, God puts His law in their inward parts, and writes it in their hearts; when they receive it, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, — not outwardly in tables of stone, but in the fleshly tables of the heart. *The law is spiritual*. — The law which proceeds from the Holy Spirit of God, demands not only the obedience of external conduct, but the internal obedience of the heart. If Paul had still regarded the law as a rule extending merely to his outward conduct, he might, as formerly, when he strictly adhered to its letter, have continued to suppose himself just and good. But when he now understood that it was also spiritual, extending to the most secret desires of his heart, he discovered in himself so much opposition to its penetrating and discerning power, that, as he had said, *sin revived, and he died*.” [Haldane, *Romans*, pg 291]

**carnal, fleshly** — “In calling himself ‘fleshly,’ Paul may mean no more than that he is human, subject to the frailty of all human beings, whether Christian or not. But the contrast with ‘spiritual’ points to a more negative meaning. As in 1 Cor 3:1-3, where ‘fleshly’ is contrasted with ‘spiritual,’ ‘fleshly’ means ‘carnal,’ subject to, and under the influence of, ‘this world.’ Since ‘fleshly’ in 1 Cor 3:1 is applied to Christians, it is clear that this adjective itself does not require that the *egō* be unregenerate.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 453f] “*I am carnal*. — This respects what the Apostle was in himself. It does not imply that he was not regenerated, but shows what he was even in his renewed state, so far as concerned anything that was natural to him. Every Christian in this sense is carnal: in himself he is corrupt. Paul applies the epithet carnal to the Corinthians, although they were sanctified in Christ Jesus, and even in the same sentence in which he denominates them *carnal* he calls them *babes in Christ*. The word carnal, however, has not here exactly the same meaning that it has in 1 Corinthians 3:3. The Corinthians were comparatively carnal. Their disputes and envying showed their attainments in the Divine life to be low. But, in the sense of the word in this place, all Christians — the best on earth not excepted — are always carnal. They are so when compared with the spiritual law of God. They have an evil principle in their hearts or nature. While in this world, Adam lives in them, called the old man, which is corrupt, according to the deceitful lusts.” [Haldane, *Romans*, pg 292]

**sold under sin** — For Moo, it is the additional description “sold under sin” which clinches the argument for him that Paul is speaking of a non-believer. Others believe this may still apply to the believer: “Cranfield is representative of those who argue that this language can appropriately be applied to the Christian, inasmuch as the Christian continues to be sinful, and can therefore be said to be ‘under the power of sin.’ ... See also Haldane, Murray.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 454] Moo then argues against Cranfield’s position by returning to Paul’s comments in Romans 6: “However much it is true, as chap. 6 also asserts, that this freedom from sin’s power must be lived out, appropriated, and put into action, and that Christians will sometimes fail to do this (cf., e.g., 1 Cor 3:1-3), that freedom from sin’s power is absolute and irreversible (cf. 6:8-10).” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 454] As stated in the introduction to this section, it all depends on where one places the emphasis. Neither “side” may be dogmatic in their position. “Looking to the external form of the law, the Apostle declares (Philippians 3:6) that he was, in his unconverted state, blameless; and in respect to his conduct afterwards as before men, he could appeal to them (1 Thessalonians 2:10) how holily, and justly, and unblameably he had behaved himself among them. But in referring, also, as he does here, to what is internal, and therefore speaking as before God, who alone searcheth the heart, and measuring himself by the holy law in all its extent, he confesses himself to be carnal and sold under sin. His nature, or old man, was entirely opposed to the spirituality of the law. He felt a law or power within him against which he struggled, from which he desired to be free, but which still asserted its tyrannical authority. Notwithstanding the grace he had obtained, he found himself far from perfection, and in all respects unable, though ardently desiring, to attain that much wished for object. When he says he is carnal — sold under sin — he expresses the same sentiment as in the 18th verse where, distinguishing between his old and new nature, he says, ‘in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing;’ or, as he speaks elsewhere concerning the old man in believers, ‘which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,’ which he exhorts them to put off. It ought to be noted that, when the Apostle says, I am carnal, sold under sin, it is the language of bitter complaint, as appears from the sequel, and especially from the 24th verse, which expresses a feeling respecting sin that does not belong to any unregenerate man. It is, then, in comparing himself with the holy, just, good, and spiritual law, now come home in its power to his conscience, that the Apostle here declares himself to be *carnal, sold under sin*. The law requires us to love God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind, and with all our strength; and our neighbor as ourselves. Of this, every man in his best state, and in his very best thought or action, falls continually short. He proceeds a certain length in his obedience, but beyond that he cannot go. And why is it that into the region beyond this he does not advance? Because he is carnal, sold under sin. The sin that remains in him binds him so that he cannot proceed. Sin, however, does not reign over him; otherwise, as it is directly opposed to every degree of obedience to the law, it would not suffer him to do anything, even the least, in conformity to the will of God. Yet it so far prevails as to hinder him, as is here immediately added, from doing the good that he would, and in so far he is sold under it. It therefore prevents him from attaining to that perfection of obedience to the law of God which is the most earnest desire of every Christian, and to which the believer shall attain when he sees his blessed Lord as He is, 1 John 3:2.” [Haldane, *Romans*, pg 293]

**v 15** — “In one of the most famous passages of the epistle, Paul now graphically portrays his failure to do what he wills. The conflict between ‘willing’ and ‘doing’ dominates the narration of this conflict (vv. 15-20) and the inference Paul draws from it (v. 21). What Paul wills is that ‘good’ required by God’s law; the ‘evil’ that he does, which he hates and does not acknowledge, is,

then, a collective term for those things prohibited and in conflict with God's law.... Paul begins with a general assertion that he does not 'know,' or, better, 'approve,' what he 'does.' In v. 15b, Paul explains in what sense he does not 'approve' what he is doing: 'For it is not what I will, this I am practicing, but what I am hating, this I am doing.' Paul's confession is similar to others found in the ancient world, the most famous being that in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 7.21: 'I see and approve the better course, but I follow the worse.'" [Moo, *Romans*, pg 455, 457]

"Verses 15-20 are related to v. 14 in two ways. First, they show how, in willing to do the good the law demands, Paul attests to the divine origin of the law (v. 16). Second, and more important for Paul's purpose, the conflict between willing and doing reveals that he is indeed 'fleshly,' and under sin's power; for only the presence of such an alien influence — 'sin dwelling in my flesh' (vv. 17-18a) — can explain his radical failure to do what he wills." [Moo, *Romans*, pg 456]

**that which I know, approve** — “γινώσκω [ginōskō] could retain its purely cognitive meaning, in the sense that Paul does not 'perceive' the real nature of what he is doing (Chrysostom). But it is more likely that the word means (as in, e.g., Matt 7:23; 25:12) 'acknowledge, approve' (BAGD; Cranfield).” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 457] “*That which I do, I allow not.* — Literally, I know not. The English word *know*, as well as the word in the original, is often used as implying recognition or acknowledgment. We are said not to know a person whom we do not choose to recognize. Paul committed sin, but he did not recognize or approve it. He disclaimed all friendly acquaintance with it... Some suppose that what the Apostle says in this verse is to the same purpose with the noted heathen confession, 'I see what is better and approve of it; I follow what is worse.' But these propositions are not at all identical. The heathen confesses that he practices what he knows to be wrong, but his inconsistency arises from the love of the evil. Paul confesses that he does what is wrong, but declares that instead of loving the evil, he regards it with hatred and abhorrence.” [Haldane, *Romans*, pg 294f]

**that I will** — θέλω [thelō] is used seven times in these verses.

**but what I hate** — “The language of the apostle, in this passage, expresses a fact of consciousness, with which every Christian is familiar. Whether the conflict here described is that which, in a greater or less degree, exists in every man, between the natural authoritative sense of right and wrong, and his corrupt inclinations; or whether it is peculiar to the Christian, must be decided by considerations drawn from the whole description, and from the connection of this passage with the preceding and succeeding portions of the apostle's discourse. It is enough to remark here, that every Christian can adopt the language of this verse. Pride, coldness, slothfulness, and other feelings which he disapproves and hates, are, day by day, reasserting their power over him. He struggles against their influence, groans beneath their bondage, longs to be filled with meekness, humility, and all other fruits of the love of God, but finds he can neither of himself, nor by the aid of the law, effect his freedom from what he hates, or the full performance of what he desires and approves. Every evening witnesses his penitent confession of his degrading bondage, his sense of utter helplessness, and his longing desire for aid from above. He is a slave looking and longing for liberty. Two consequences flow from this representation of the experience of the Christian. First, the fault is felt and acknowledged to be his own; the law is not to be blamed, ver. 16. Second, this state of feeling is consistent with his being a Christian, ver. 17.” [Hodge, *Romans*, pg 231]

**that I do** — Paul uses three different Greek words in this context and *may* be distinguished as follows: ποιέω [poieō] which could be translated “do,” πράσσω [prassō] which could be translated “practice,” and κατεργάζομαι [katergazomai] which could be translated “produce.” Yet it is not clear that Paul intends any difference in meaning among them since the definitions have considerable, if not complete, overlap in meaning. [Moo, *Romans*, pg 455]

**v 16** — “The fact that he does not do what he purposes to do means that he 'agrees' with those who say — as Paul has done in v. 12, 13, and 14 — that the law is good. Assumed in Paul's argument is that what he wills to do (v. 15b) is what the law demands. And because he does not do what the law demands, it could be concluded that he rejects the law as a moral guide. But Paul wants to draw the opposite conclusion; the very fact that he has a will that conflicts with the evil actually done shows that there is a part of this person — the 'part' that has to do with the will — that acknowledges the just demands of God's law.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 457] “Paul here asserts that his acting contrary to the law was no evidence that he thought the law evil; for what he did he disapproved. But to disapprove and condemn what the law forbids, is to assent to the excellence of the law. There is a constant feeling of self-disapprobation, and a sense of the excellence of the law, in the Christian's mind. He is, therefore, never disposed to blame the extent or severity of the law, but admits the fault to be in himself.” [Hodge, *Romans*, pg 231]

**v 17 — NO EXCUSING OUR RESPONSIBILITY** — “‘But now ... no longer’ is logical, not temporal; it states what must ‘now,’ in light of the argument of vv. 15-16, ‘no longer’ be considered true. And what is no longer true, Paul says, is that he can be considered the one who is ‘doing’ these actions he deplors. *At first sight, Paul would appear to be saying something unlikely and, indeed, dangerous: that he is not responsible for his actions. But this is not what he means. His point is that his failure to put into action what he wills to do shows that there is something besides himself involved in the situation. If we had only to do with him, in the sense of that part of him which agrees with God's law and wills to do it, we would not be able to explain why he consistently does what he does not want to do. No, Paul reasons, there must be another ‘actor’ in the drama, another factor that interferes with his performance of what he wants to do. This other factor is indwelling sin. Sin is not a power that operates ‘outside’ the person, making him do its bidding; sin is something resident in the very being, ‘dwelling’ within the person, ruling over him or her like a master over a slave (v. 14b). Because of this power of ‘sin dwelling in me,’ Paul is frustrated in carrying out what he knows to be God's good will. Paul does not, then, transfer responsibility for doing wrong from the*

*individual Jew to an outside influence; he fixes that responsibility on that power within the person which leads that person to do what is wrong.*” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 457f] “This feeling of helplessness is not only consistent with a sense and acknowledgment of accountability, but is always found united with genuine self-condemnation and penitence. There are, in general, few stronger indications of ignorance of the power and evil of sin, than the confident assertion of our ability to resist and subdue it.” [Hodge, *Romans*, pg 231f] “It is quite obvious that the reason why Paul says that it was not *he* but *sin* in him, is because, as he had just stated, that which he did he allowed not, for he did that which he would not. This implies more than reason and conscience. It was therefore *sin that dwelt in him* — the old man, his carnal nature, which not only existed and wrought in him, but had its abode in him, as it has in all those who are regenerated, and will have so long as they are in the body. It is not, then, to extenuate the evil of sin, or to furnish an excuse for it, that Paul says, It is no more I, but sin that dwelleth in me; but to show that, notwithstanding his seeing it to be evil, and hating it, the root still subsisted in him, and was chargeable upon him.” [Haldane, *Romans*, pg 295]

**v 18** — “The assertion in v. 17 that indwelling sin is finally responsible for Paul’s tragic failure to do God’s will is the center of vv. 15-20. Verses 15-16 have led up to it; vv. 18-20 expand on it. Verse 18a is closely related to v. 17b, continuing with the language of ‘dwelling in me.’ Paul has just said that ‘sin dwells in me’; now he restates this same basic point from the negative side: ‘good does not dwell in me.’ Not ‘good,’ but ‘sin,’ has taken control of him, and is determining his actions. But Paul adds a very important qualification to this statement: ‘that is, in my flesh.’ Those who find in this passage a description of Christian experience think this phrase qualifies the statement that ‘good does not dwell in me’ by leaving room for the Holy Spirit.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 458] “These verses [vv. 18-20] contain an amplification and confirmation of the sentiment of the preceding verses. They reassert the existence, and explain the nature of the inward struggle of which the apostle had been speaking. ‘I am unable to come up to the requirements of the law, not because they are unreasonable, but because I am corrupt; there is no good in me. I can approve and delight in the exhibitions of holiness made by the law, but full conformity to its demands is more than I can attain. It is not I, therefore, my real and lasting self, but this intrusive tyrant dwelling within me, that disobeys the law.’ This strong and expressive language, though susceptible of a literal interpretation, which would make it teach not only error but nonsense, is still perfectly perspicuous and correct, because accurately descriptive of the common feelings of men. Paul frequently employs similar modes of expression. When speaking of his apostolic labors, he says, “Yet not I, but the grace of God, which was with me,” 1 Corinthians 15:10. And in Galatians 2:20, he says, “I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.” As no one supposes that the labors and life here spoken of were not the labors and life of the apostle, or that they did not constitute and express his moral character; so no Christian supposes that the greatness and power of his sin frees him from its responsibility, even when he expresses his helpless misery by saying, with the apostle, “It is not I, but sin that dwelleth in me.” This doctrine of sin as *indwelling* is irreconcilable with the assumption that sin consists exclusively in acts of the will, or even, in the widest sense of the terms, in voluntary action. An indwelling act is a solecism. Sin, in this, as in so many other places of Scripture, is presented as an abiding state of the mind, a disposition or principle, manifesting itself in acts. It is this that gives sin its power. We have measurably power over our acts, but over our immanent principles we have no direct control. They master us and not we them. Herein consists our bondage to sin. And as the power of an indwelling principle is increased by exercise, so the strength of sin is increased by every voluntary evil act. No act is isolated. ‘Nothing,’ says Olshausen, ‘is more dangerous than the erroneous opinion that an evil act can stand alone, or that a man can commit one sin and then stop. All evil is concatenated, and every sin increases the power of the indwelling corruption in a fearful progression, until, sooner than the sinner dreams of, his head swims, and he is plunged into the abyss.’” [Hodge, *Romans*, pg 233]

**that is in my flesh** — “He confines the assertion to his carnal nature. *Nothing can more clearly and expressly show that this description is a description of the regenerate man. What has an unrenewed man but flesh? His very reason and conscience are defiled, Titus 1:15.*” [Haldane, *Romans*, pg 296]

**v 19** — “This verse repeats the substance of v. 15b, with the difference that the ‘good’ that is willed and the ‘evil’ that is done are made explicit.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 460] “Paul reasserts that he was unable to act up to his purposes and desires. For example, he doubtless desired to love God with all his heart, and at all times, but constantly was his love colder and less operative than the law demands. This verse is, therefore, but an amplification of the last clause of ver. 18.” [Hodge, *Romans*, pg 233]

**v 20** — “Paul continues to go over the same ground, making sure that his point gets across. In this verse, he brings together a clause from v. 16b and v. 17b in a new combination, but he does not go beyond what he has already said there.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 460]

**v 21** — “On the basis of the unsuccessful struggle to do the good demanded by the Mosaic law, Paul now draws a conclusion: ‘Therefore, I find this law: when I will to do the good, evil is present there with me.’” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 460] “The evil propensity of our nature the Apostle calls a law, because of its strength and permanence. It has the force of a law in corrupt nature. This proves that it is of himself, as to his present state, that the Apostle speaks. None but the regenerate man is properly sensible of this law. It does not refer to conscience, which in an unregenerate man will smite him when he does that which he knows to be wrong. *It refers to the evil principle which counteracts him when he would do that which is right. This law is the greatest grievance to every Christian. It disturbs his happiness and peace more than any other cause. It constantly besets him, and, from its influence, his very prayers, instead of being in themselves worthy of God, need forgiveness, and can be accepted only*

*through the mediation of Christ. It is strange that any Christian should even hesitate as to the character in which the Apostle uses this language. It entirely suits the Christian, and not in one solitary feature does it wear the feeblest semblance of any other character.*" [Haldane, *Romans*, pg 297]

**v 22** — "Verses 22-23 belong together antithetically, as Paul once again contrasts the conflicting tendencies toward the Mosaic law within himself: genuine, deep-seated delight in that law and acceptance of it in 'the mind'; unrelieved and successful resistance to the demands of that law in 'the members.' These verses, then, restate in objective terms the conflict that Paul has subjectively described in vv. 15-20. His immediate purpose is to explain the 'rule' he has discovered with respect to himself in v. 21." [Moo, *Romans*, pg 460f]

**delight** — "rejoice in, take delight in." "Lit., *I rejoice with*. Stronger than *I consent unto* (ver., 16). It is the agreement of moral sympathy." [Vincent, *Word Studies*, vol 3 pg 82] "The word used here occurs no where else in the New Testament. It properly means to rejoice with anyone; and expresses not only approbation of the understanding, as the expression, 'I consent unto the law,' in Romans 7:16, but more than that it denotes sensible pleasure in the heart. It indicates not only intellectual assent, but emotion, an emotion of pleasure in the contemplation of the Law." [Barne's *Notes on the Bible: Romans*]

**v 23** — "Ranged against his delight in God's law is 'another law,' 'in my members,' 'fighting against the law of my mind and holding me captive in the law of sin that is in my members.' ... [It is best] to take 'law of my mind' and 'law of sin' as two further and more specific designations of the 'law of God' and the 'other law,' respectively. The Mosaic law is that law with which the mind agrees, that 'I' confess to be good and seek to obey, while the 'other law' is nothing more than that authority or demand of sin which works through, and becomes resident in, my 'members' (cf. vv. 17b-18a: sin dwelling in the flesh)." [Moo, *Romans*, pg 464, 464]

**bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members** — "The principle of evil is not only active, but it is conquering. It takes the soul captive. So that it is, in the sense of ver. 14, the slave of sin. Not its willing servant, but its miserable, helpless victim. *This does not mean that sin always triumphs in act, but simply that it is a power from which the soul cannot free itself. It remains, and wars, in spite of all that we can do.*" [Hodge, *Romans*, pg 237]

**v 24** — "That expression of Paul's has been (and I think rightly) supposed to refer to an ancient penalty inflicted on a man that had committed a certain offense. He was chained to a dead body, and he had to carry that dead body with him everywhere he went. He alive, that body dead, he would want a pure atmosphere to inhale, and that body would be exhaling the stench of corruption. It was a miserable condition: 'who will deliver me from this body of death?' One of the great French preachers preached on that subject before Louis XIV. We find a reference to it in Strong's Systematic Theology. He was talking about the two I's; 'that which I approve I do not; that which I would not do that I do.' And the French preacher was pointing out the two men in a man, and how they fought against each other, and the king interrupted him in his sermon and said, 'Ah, I know those two men.' The preacher pointed at him and said, 'Sire, it is somewhat to know them, but, your majesty, one or the other of them must die.' It isn't enough just to know them; one or the other of them is going ultimately to triumph." [Carroll, *Interpretation of English Bible*; vol 5 pg 156]

"The burden of indwelling sin was a load which the apostle could neither cast off nor bear. He could only groan under its pressure, and long for deliverance by a power greater than his.... This exclamation is evidently from a burdened heart. It is spoken out of the writer's own consciousness, and shows that although the apostle represents a class, he himself belonged to that class. It is his own experience as a Christian to which he gives utterance." [Hodge, *Romans*, pg 237f]

**wretched** — "Originally, wretched through the exhaustion of hard labor." [Vincent, *Word Studies*, vol 3 pg 84]

**who** — "Referring to a *personal* deliverer." [Vincent, *Word Studies*, vol 3 pg 84]

**v 25** — "The burden of sin being the great evil under which the apostle and all other believers labor, from which no efficacy of the law, and no efforts of their own can deliver them, their case would be entirely hopeless but for help from on high. 'Sin shall not have dominion over you,' is the language of the grace of God in the gospel. The conflict which the believer sustains is not to result in the victory of sin, but in the triumph of grace. In view of this certain and glorious result, Paul exclaims, '*I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.*' This is evidently the expression of a strong and sudden emotion of gratitude." [Hodge, *Romans*, pg 238]

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**"We are all as an unclean thing." — Isaiah 64:6**

The believer is a new creature, he belongs to a holy generation and a peculiar people — the Spirit of God is in him, and in all respects he is far removed from the natural man; but for all that the Christian is a sinner still. He is so from the imperfection of his nature, and will continue so to the end of his earthly life. The black fingers of sin leave smuts upon our fairest robes. Sin mars our repentance, ere the great Potter has finished it, upon the wheel. Selfishness defiles our tears, and unbelief tampers with our faith. The best thing we ever did apart from the merit of Jesus only swelled the number of our sins; for when we have been most pure in



our own sight, yet, like the heavens, we are not pure in God's sight; and as He charged His angels with folly, much more must He charge us with it, even in our most angelic frames of mind. The song which thrills to heaven, and seeks to emulate seraphic strains, hath human discords in it. The prayer which moves the arm of God is still a bruised and battered prayer, and only moves that arm because the sinless One, the great Mediator, has stepped in to take away the sin of our supplication. The most golden faith or the purest degree of sanctification to which a Christian ever attained on earth, has still so much alloy in it as to be only worthy of the flames, in itself considered. Every night we look in the glass we see a sinner, and had need confess, "We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." Oh, how precious the blood of Christ to such hearts as ours! How priceless a gift is His perfect righteousness! And how bright the hope of perfect holiness hereafter! Even now, though sin dwells in us, its power is broken. It has no dominion; it is a broken-backed snake; we are in bitter conflict with it, but it is with a vanquished foe that we have to deal. Yet a little while and we shall enter victoriously into the city where nothing defileth. [Spurgeon, *Morning and Evening*, devotion for Oct 27<sup>th</sup>]

## APPENDIX: "SPIRITUALITY: WHO WE ARE, NOT WHAT WE DO"

Ref: *Principles of Spiritual Growth* by Miles Stanford; *Faith is the Victory* by Buell Kazee

### Before we start . . .

(1) Since God treats us all as individuals, we cannot have a "how-to" mentality to spiritual growth. There is no "step 1 ... 2 ... 3" way to grow in Christ. Think of tonight's thoughts as principles or spiritual truths which aid in our growth or help explain our growth.

(2) The NT teaches sanctification in a variety of manners, each with a different emphasis. It would therefore be a great error to "latch on" to any one, single truth concerning sanctification while neglecting the other NT teachings concerning our growth.

### INTRODUCTION

I want to direct our thoughts to a single concept brought forth by the apostle John: "*But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.*" (1 John 1:7) What was brought out by Kazee / Stanford / others is how this verse relates to this question: "*what does it mean to grow spiritually?*" The typical response may involve many things but one thing which is always prominent is this: "*a tendency to sin less and less.*" While I certainly would not disagree with that answer, it should be pointed out that ***that kind of thinking is at best a partial answer.***

Why does John make his statement the way he does? If the "*the more I grow spiritually the less I sin*" concept is correct, John would be more proper to write, "*But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and we will require the blood of Jesus Christ His Son less and less as we will sin less and less.*" But John does not say that. It is these concepts we will discuss tonight.

Don't get ahead of me. Someone may already have a red flag in their mind popping up, asking, "*Are you saying we will not sin less and less as we grow spiritually?*" Keep that question on hold for the time being; we will address it before we are finished tonight.



### UNSAVED: THE POSITION OF DAMNATION AND JUDGEMENT

I want to use an illustration tonight from Buell Kazee. This illustration begins with the sinner outside of the saving grace of God, or as illustrated, in complete darkness.

Two important items in relation to that position are these: ***Sin is (1) rooted in self and pride, and (2) sin deceives and blinds the sinner to the reality and effects of sin.*** The fact that sin is rooted in self and pride is the reason even "good" or "religious" works are rejected by God.

*"But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away."* (Isa 64:6 KJV)

*"An high look, and a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked, is sin."* (Prov 21:4 KJV)

*"The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God."* (Rom 8:7,8 NIV)

*"Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God."* (1 Cor 4:5 NIV)

The second item concerning the blinding effects of sin may be seen in several places throughout the bible:

“And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness” (Rom 2:19)

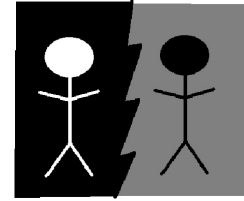
“What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded” (Rom 11:7)

“But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ.” (2 Cor 3:14)

“In whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.” (2 Cor 4:4)

“Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart” (Eph 4:18)

That’s why, as a rule of thumb, the more defiled the sinner, the more they think they are OK — that is, the more sin in a person’s life, typically (unless the Lord is working in that sinner’s life) there is more self-righteousness and a hardness to sin.



## POST-SALVATION

After salvation, for the first time in the sinner’s life, the sinner truly *begins* to see himself the way God sees him. The light is turned on for the first time and the sinner can see himself as sinful, at least to a degree. **Comments:** (1) it may be argued the sinner appears sinful prior to salvation, otherwise there would be no conviction of sin and the realization of a need for a Savior. But those moments are momentary, fleeting, and argued against by the carnal mind. It is not until regeneration that the sinner fully accepts this truth. (2) The key word in this initial principle is the word “*begins*.”

“Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Col 1:13 KJV)

“To open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.” (Acts 26:18 NIV)

“God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.” (1 John 1:5b,6 NIV)

Prior to continuing, let’s note the difference between *obtaining life in Christ* and *growing in the Christian life*.

The transformation between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light is an “either/or” type of transaction; i.e., there is no such thing as being “half-saved” or “almost saved.” Everyone on earth tonight is either saved (a child of God) or unsaved (a child of darkness). The transition between the darkness and the light is momentary and instantaneous. But once that transaction has taken place and the sinner comes under the influence of saving grace, growth in Christ is gradual and continual. We may illustrate the differences in this manner: ***Christian life is not to be likened unto a light switch (on/off only) but rather as a dimmer switch (push on, then gradual change to increase the light)***.

Contrast that concept with this teaching: when I was first saved, the first church of which I was a member separated people as either being “spiritual” or “carnal” (you were always quite proud if you were listed among the “spiritual”). And it is true Paul speaks of carnal Christians, babes in Christ. It is also true Paul spoke of “you who are spiritual.” But these designations fit the context Paul was addressing. It would be a great error to take these statements and divide Christianity into two groups, the “spiritual” and the “carnal.” ***Even a new Christian is spiritual to some degree or another, and even the oldest Christian has elements of carnality.*** As we continue tonight and I speak of several “states,” this must all be related back to the fact we are all on a path.



## THE DESIRED POSITION OF HOLINESS

To continue Kazeer’s illustration, imagine the sinner standing at the end of a long, dark hallway. At the other end of the hallway is a bright light. As the sinner stands at the end, there is a small amount of light present but the light is dim, the area mostly dark and the sinner being able to see but little. At this point, the sinner looks at himself and begins to see his sin, areas which are not right, motives that are incorrect, and so forth. But the area is dark and only a little may be seen.

Spiritual growth in this illustration is when the sinner walks towards the light at the end of the hallway (or, stated another way which is equally correct, the sinner is drawn towards the light at the end of the hallway by the Holy Spirit). As he walks, the hallway becomes brighter and brighter. As the light grows, more and more of the sinner’s sin may be seen. Things which before did not bother the sinner now bothers him. Areas of which he was ignorant before is now becoming painfully obvious. Things the sinner used to do, even “good” things, now become questionable as the sinner asks more of why he did these things versus what was being done. This continues and grows as the sinner approaches the light.

As the sinner approaches the light, it becomes apparent what John meant in his first epistle:

***“The Bible does not teach that anyone can achieve an experience which eradicates all sin. I can show that the teaching of the Bible is this: The holier we become the more sin we will see in our lives. And that is why John says: ‘If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of His Son Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin’ (1 John 1:7). Now, if ever a believer could get in a state where he would not sin, it must be when he is walking in the light and having fellowship with other believers. That is the most sublime walk possible to a believer here on earth. Then, if that be true, why does the blood of Jesus have to be cleansing him from sin? The tense is present, continued action — ‘keeps on cleansing.’ It is because the believer is in the light, sees his sins, confesses them, and the blood keeps cleansing.... The Bible seems to teach that holiness consists in seeing our sins, and those of us who get close enough to God to be in the light can do nothing but confess ourselves sinners.”*** (Buell Kazee, *Faith is the Victory*, p58f)

***PRINCIPLE: Spiritual growth involves a growing awareness of both who God is and who the sinner is.*** This is important and may be stated another way: ***Spiritual growth is a growing awareness of our own sinfulness before a holy God.*** This truth may be seen in scripture and Christian history as well as personal experience:

*“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory. At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. Woe to me! I cried. I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.”* (Isa 6:1-5 NIV)

*“While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him! When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified.”* (Matt 17:5,6 NIV)

*“When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!”* (Luke 5:8 NIV)

*“Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, Who is it you want? Jesus of Nazareth, they replied. I am he, Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) When Jesus said, I am he, they drew back and fell to the ground.”* (John 18:4-6 NIV)

*“When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last.”* (Rev 1:17 NIV)

This might be stated as a growth from “sins” to “sin.” At first we see where we fail and ask forgiveness for what we do. As we grow in Christ we begin to see more and more our inner depravity. Our prayers change from asking forgiveness for what we do to asking forgiveness for *who we are!* This does not mean we do not confess our sins but only that we become more aware of the root of those sins.

***“The Holy Spirit always reasons down from what God is, and this produces a total change in my soul. It is not that I abhor my sins; indeed I may have been walking very well; but it is ‘I abhor myself.’ This is how the Holy Spirit reasons; He shows us what we are, and that is one reason why He often seems to be very hard and does not give peace to the soul, as we are not relieved until we experientially, from our hearts, acknowledge what we are.*** Until the soul comes to that point He does not give it peace — He could not; it would be healing the wound slightly. The soul has to go on until it finds there is nothing to rest on but the abstract goodness of God; and then, ‘If God be for us, who can be against us?’ (Rom 8:31b).” (J. N. Darby; q.v. Miles Stanford, *The Complete Green Letters*; pg 11f)

***“We affirm, then, that just in proportion to his spiritual enlightenment and self-knowledge, the Christian (a) regards his outward deviations from God’s laws, and his evil inclinations and desires, as outgrowths and revelations of a depravity of nature which lies below his consciousness; and (b) repents more deeply for this depravity of nature, which constitutes his inmost character and is inseparable from himself, than for what he merely feels or does....*** Compare David’s experience, Ps 51:6 — ‘Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou wilt make me to know wisdom.’ — with Paul’s experience in Rom 7:24 — ‘wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?’ — with Isaiah’s experience (6:5), when in the presence of God’s glory he uses the words of the leper (Lev 13:45) and calls himself ‘unclean,’ and with Peter’s experience (Luke 5:8) when at the manifestation of Christ’s miraculous power he ‘fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.’ So the Publican cries: ‘God, be thou merciful to me the sinner’ (Luke 18:13), and Paul calls himself the ‘chief’ of sinners (1 Tim 1:15). ***It is evident that in none of these cases were there merely single acts of transgression in view; the humiliation and self-aborrence were in view of permanent states of depravity.*** Van Oosterzee: ‘What we do outwardly is only the revelation of our inner nature.’ The outcropping and visible rock is but small in extent compared with the rock that is underlying and invisible. The iceberg has eight-ninths of its mass below the surface of the sea, yet icebergs have been seen near Cape Horn from 700 to 800 feet high above the water.

“It may be doubted whether any repentance is genuine which is not repentance for sin rather than for sins; compare John 16:8 — the Holy Spirit ‘will convict the world in respect of sin.’ ... *Dr. A. J. Gordon, just before his death, desired to be left alone. He was then overheard confessing his sins in such seemingly extravagant terms as to excite fear that he was in delirium.* Martensen, Dogmatics, 389 — *Luther during his early experience ‘often wrote to Staupitz: “Oh, my sins, my sins!” and yet in the confessional he could name no sins in particular which he had to confess; so that it was clearly a sense of the general depravity of his nature which filled his soul with deep sorrow and pain.’* ... After twenty years of religious experience, Jonathan Edwards wrote (Works 1:22,23; also 3:16-18): *‘Often since I have lived in this town I have had very affecting views of my own sinfulness and vileness, very frequently to such a degree as to hold me in a kind of loud weeping, sometimes for a considerable time together, so that I have been often obliged to shut myself up. I have had a vastly greater sense of my own wickedness and the badness of my heart than ever I had before my conversion. It has often appeared to me that if God should mark iniquity against me, I should appear the very worst of all mankind, of all that have been since the beginning of the world to this time; and that I should have by far the lowest place in hell.... When I look into my heart and take a view of my wickedness, it looks like an abyss infinitely deeper than hell.... It is affecting to think how ignorant I was, when a young Christian, of the bottomless, infinite depths of wickedness, pride, hypocrisy, and deceit left in my heart.’*

*“Jonathan Edwards was not an ungodly man, but the holiest man of his time. He was not an enthusiast, but a man of acute, philosophic mind. He was not a man who indulged in exaggerated or random statements, for with his power of introspection and analysis he combined a faculty and habit of exact expression unsurpassed among the sons of men....*

“H. B. Smith (Systematic Theology, 275) quotes Thomasius as saying: *‘It is a striking fact in Scripture that statements of the depth and power of sin are chiefly from the regenerate.’* Another has said that ‘a serpent is never seen at its whole length until it is dead.’ Thomas à Kempis — ‘Do not think that thou hast made any progress toward perfection, till thou feellest that thou art less than the least of all human beings.’” (A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*; pg 555ff)

COMMENT: *this is much easier to fake than it is to truly realize. It is only time and the grace of God that can show a man his own heart.* For one to stand and make a show of how much of a sinner he is, is only to demonstrate how far that person is from truly seeing his own depravity. That kind of show is nothing more than pride to appear more humble and holy than he is in reality. *If one truly sees himself as depraved, full of sin and broken before God, the last thing that person will do is parade that “humility” before others!*

COMMENT: *by definition those in the “DESIRED POSITION” will be sensitive to sin.* This truth goes directly against a common error: it is becoming more common for believers to give in to the flesh, live in open sin yet think their relationship between them and the Lord is acceptable. “After all, we’re all sinners but God is love and we live in grace. He understands my weakness and does not want me to live in mental agony. He accepts me as I am and by faith I accept that, even though I sin.” This attitude is a perversion of the grace of God. *If we are really in the presence of a holy God and really see sin in ourselves, then we will be drawn to holiness, not excuses!*

COMMENT: we must maintain a balance between “vile, rotten sinner” and forgiveness in Christ. We just read of Jonathan Edwards’ broken confession of sin as he stood in the presence of God, but Edwards was known as much for his Christian joy as he was for his piety (see quote below). The proper balance is this: *we are broken because of our depravity but find joy in Christ alone and what He’s done for us, not in our own merits.*

COMMENT: Sometimes a new believer in Christ will begin to grow and will get to this state without understanding what is happening. He is trying to live correctly but becomes more uneasy with his spiritual walk. If not taught these truths, the new believer may misunderstand his emotions and believe himself far away from God when just the opposite is true. Not knowing what to do, the believer begins to fall away from the Lord until he is comfortable again. If not careful, the new believer becomes locked into an undesired state (to be discussed later) where he is comfortable.

COMMENT: cp: Dobson, “That God should save a worm such as I” has “done much harm to Christianity” — self-esteem cult

The list keeps getting longer, More than I can count  
 I thought I could get close to more deserving  
 Unworthy on my best day, Unworthy at my worst  
 To receive the blessing that you give me freely  
 (chorus): Grace keeps giving me things I don’t deserve  
 Mercy keeps withholding things I do  
 Words that seldom fail me  
 Leave me looking for the words  
 To express my gratitude for grace.

(from “Grace” by Wayne Watson; from his CD “Living Room”)

## ADVANCEMENT TO THE DESIRED POSITION OF HOLINESS

Much could be said concerning how this growth is to occur: bible reading, prayer, church attendance, giving, witnessing, etc. For



tonight's purpose however, let's look at one aspect of our growth in particular.

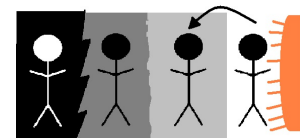
***“God has a natural law in force to the effect that we are conformed to that on which we center our interest and love.*** Hawthorne brought out this fact in ‘The Great Stone Face.’ Then too, think of Germany some years ago, full of little Hitlers all because of fanatical devotion to a second-rate paper-hanger! Here in our country comic books, radio, TV and movies have all contributed in giving us a rising generation of young policemen, cowboys, gangsters, etc. And what of the believer? ***If we are attracted to this present evil world, we become increasingly worldly; if we pamper and live for self, we become more and more self-centered; but when we look to Jesus Christ, we become more and more like Him.*** Norman Douty writes, ‘If I am to be like Him, then God in His grace must do it, and the sooner I come to recognize it the sooner I will be delivered from another form of bondage. Throw down every endeavor and say, I cannot do it, the more I try the farther I get from His likeness. What shall I do? Ah, the Holy Spirit says, You cannot do it; just withdraw; come out of it. You have been in the arena, you have been endeavoring, you are a failure, come out and sit down, and as you sit there behold Him, look at Him. Don't try to be like Him, just look at Him. Just be occupied with Him. Forget about trying to be like Him. Instead of letting that fill your mind and heart, let Him fill it. Just behold Him, look upon Him through the Word. Come to the Word for one purpose and that is to meet the Lord. Not to get your mind crammed full of things about the sacred Word, but come to it to meet the Lord. Make it to be a medium, not of Biblical scholarship, but of fellowship with Christ. Behold the Lord.’” (Miles Stanford, *The Complete Green Letters*; pg 16f)

“Self-revelation precedes divine revelation — that is a principle for both spiritual birth and spiritual growth. The believer who is going through struggle and failure is the Christian who is being carefully and lovingly handled by his Lord in a very personal way. He is being taken through the experience (years in extent) of self-revelation and into death, the only basis upon which to ‘know Him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death’ (Phil 3:10). God works by paradox. Success comes via failure; life springs out of death, etc. The only element in the believer's life that crumbles is that which has to go anyway — the new life can never be harmed or affected. This disintegration is something the believer cannot enter into nor engineer on his own — self will never cast out self. He has to be led into it by the mercy of the Holy Spirit — into failure; abject and total. ‘For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.’ (2 Cor 4:11). So often the means utilized by the Spirit is an unsaved mate, or even a saved one! Or poor health, yes, and good health, too! A thousand and one things are used by Him — in fact, everything (Rom 8:28,29), to bring out the worst in us, ultimately enabling us to see that the Christian life has to be ‘not I, but Christ.’ People, circumstances, etc., are never the cause of failure. Self's reaction to them is the cause, and the one problem to be dealt with. ‘It's me, it's me, O Lord.’” (Miles Stanford, *The Complete Green Letters*; pg 41)

***“[T]he essence of true religious experience is to be overwhelmed by a glimpse of the beauty of God, to be drawn to the glory of his perfections, and to sense his irresistible love. George Marsden once wrote that it is something like being overwhelmed by the beauty of a great work of art or music. We can become so enthralled by the beauty that we lose consciousness of self and self-interest and become absorbed by the magnificent object.*** So also we can become drawn out of self-absorption by the power of the beauty of a truly lovable person. Our hearts are changed by an irresistible power. But this power gently lures; it does not coerce. Edwards taught that our eyes are opened when we are captivated by the beautiful love and glory of God in Christ, when we see this love most powerfully demonstrated in Christ's sacrificial love for the undeserving. Then we feel forced to abandon love for self as the central principle of our lives and turn to the love of God.

“Edwards describes our side of this experience as like being given a sixth sense: a sense of the beauty, glory and love of God. Edwards observes: ‘The Bible speaks of giving eyes to see, ears to hear, unstopping the ears of the deaf, and opening the eyes of them that were born blind, and turning darkness to light.’ Therefore the spiritual knowledge gained in true conversion is a kind of ‘sensible’ knowledge – as different from intellectual knowledge as the taste of honey is different from the mere intellectual understanding that honey is sweet.

“True Christian experience, then, is sensible and affective. The Christian, says Edwards, ‘does not merely rationally believe that God is glorious, but he has a sense of the gloriousness of God in his heart: ... For as God is infinitely the Greatest Being, so He is allowed to be infinitely the most beautiful and excellent: and all the beauty to be found throughout the whole creation is but the reflection of the diffused beams of that Being who hath an infinite fullness of brightness and glory; God ... is the foundation and fountain of all being and all beauty.’ ” (McDermott, Gerald R., *Jonathan Edwards, Theologian for the Church*; article in *Reformation and Revival Journal*; vol 12, #3, Summer 2003; pages 16f)



## **THE UNDESIRED POSITION OF SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS**

Unfortunately the desired position of holiness is not a natural place of habitation for sinners. It is a place of humbleness but our sinful nature is proud. It is a place of God-centeredness but our sinful nature is selfish. It is a place where we see the holiness of God, by which we look more and more sinful. So man's tendency is to back away from that point of holiness, back away from that intimate relationship with God, to a place where we are more comfortable.

How does this take place? We begin to neglect all those things which is required to be in the presence of God: a God-centered

mentality; a bible-reading schedule where we seek the Lord throughout His Word; a fervent prayer life where our hearts are open, surrendered and obedient; etc. This is not a conscious choice; rather, it devolves over a period of time until we have removed ourselves backwards and quite possibly are not even aware of the change in our position.

**NOTE: in both of these positions, outward sin is shunned. Both of these positions are what we might say are “good Christians.” In both of these positions there may be / probably is church attendance, financial giving, bible reading, prayer and other religious activities. But the difference is one of emphasis: one is self-centered and the other is God-centered, etc (as shown below).**

***The Undesired Position of Self-Righteousness***

self-righteous  
legalism, rules, lists  
proud, self-dependent  
observant of other’s sins / failures  
emphasis upon ***what we do!***

***The Desired Position of Holiness***

God-centered  
behavior, attitudes, motives  
humble, God-dependent  
conscious of his own sins / failures  
emphasis upon ***who we are!***

I want to emphasize the last item: *the difference between what we do and who we are!* That pretty well sums up all the differences between the undesired and the desired positions. The Lord Jesus always placed the emphasis upon who we are rather than our works. For example, we could look at the Sermon on the Mount, what might be called the inauguration of His kingdom. In this Sermon Jesus placed many demands and guidelines for how His children are to act within His kingdom. But prior to any of the items we are to do, He placed the emphasis upon what kind of people we are supposed to be in the beatitudes.

**A MATTER OF EMPHASIS** — Returning now to our red flag raised earlier of spiritual growth being equated with “sinning less and less.” Yes, this journey of holiness will produce the tendency to sin outwardly less and less. This is true of both of our believers in the example above. So why make such a big deal about it? ***The importance is one of emphasis. If our emphasis is on outward sin, that emphasis produces self-righteousness as we grow. But that self-righteousness keeps us from the life God desires for us. But — if our emphasis is inward, there will be outward holiness combined with inward humbleness and dependence.***

See the difference in emphasis? It is not just bible reading — people can read the bible and not see Jesus. It is not just prayer — people can spend time in “prayer” without really praying, having a true open relationship with the Lord.

**CONCLUSION** — What is your relationship with the Lord tonight? This is not a question of how much we are doing within the church; rather this is a question of our inner character. We must look inward rather than outward. May each of our prayers be “*Lord, open my eyes to my own heart. Open my eyes to more of Your glory. Show me my sins, then show me the wonderful forgiveness found in Jesus. Let me rest in You alone.*”

Someone has rightly said that there are many “separated from the world” Christians who are not “separated from themselves” Christians.

— Miles Stanford, *The Complete Green Letters*; pg 42