

EXPLANATION OF 45TH BIBLEBOOK

ROMANS 7:14-25 (April A.D. 67)

INTRODUCTION

In Romans 7: 7-13, Paul teaches that the function of the law is *to cause sin to come to life*.

In Romans 7:14-25, Paul teaches that *there is a spiritual and moral war between sin and holiness going on in the Christian. The Christian has, as it were, two natures: a sinful nature and a regenerate nature. The sinful nature is not his real nature, but it is nevertheless a power that often makes him a prisoner*. Time and again, the believer commits certain sins, but he longs to be freed from these sins. The moral law cannot deliver him from the power and the depravity of sin!

From his own experience Paul shows *the insufficiency of the law for holiness (sanctification)*! In the inward conflict between sin and holiness there is no law that can help the Christian. The only hope of victory in the struggle between his sinful nature and his regenerate nature is in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

OUTLINE

(III) 7:14-25. The function of 'the law of sin': it makes the believer a prisoner of sin.

- a. The indwelling sin is not the believer's real nature (7:14-20).
- b. The law cannot destroy the sinful nature (7:16-20)
- c. The indwelling sin is a power from which a believer cannot deliver himself (7:21-23).
- d. Only Jesus Christ can rescue the believer from this body of death (7:24-25).

(IV) 7:14-25. The phase of Paul's personal experience portrayed in this passage.

- a. Paul's statement in Romans 7:24 about himself is humble and realistic.
- b. Paul's statements in Romans 7:14-25 are more likely a description of a regenerate believer than an unregenerate unbeliever.
- c. Paul's statements in Romans 7:14-25 do not contradict his statements about the regenerate believer in Romans 6:6-7,18,22.
- d. The complete picture from the letter to the Romans is that the Christian is 'a sinner-saint'.
- e. Paul's statements in Romans 7:14-25 are completely opposite to his statements about unregenerate people in Romans 7:5,9a.
- f. Paul's statements in Romans 7:14-25 are completely opposite to his statements about unregenerate people in Romans 8:5-8.

EXPLANATION

(III) 7:14-25. The function of 'the law of sin': it makes the believer a prisoner of sin.

In Romans 7:7-25 Paul explains the benefit and effect of the law. Deliverance from the law is necessary, not because the law is evil, but because the Jewish religious leaders and teachers have made the law into a means of justification (salvation). The law cannot make anybody righteous or holy. The law can only give someone knowledge and an awareness of sin.

The law makes him more alert, but it cannot destroy the dominion of indwelling sin (the sinful nature of man). This inability is not due to the nature of the law, but to the nature of indwelling sin. The believer still commits sins, but the indwelling sin is not his real nature anymore, because he longs to be delivered from it. The law can do nothing to destroy the power and corruption of sin in any person in the world!

a. The indwelling sin is not the believer's real nature (7:14-15).

7:14. We know¹ (vira) that the law is *always* (vipa) *spiritual* (in nature), but I am *always* (vipa) carnal, sold (as a slave)² (vprp) under the sin.

7:15. For what I am accomplishing (achieving)³ (vipn), that I do not understand (comprehend, or acknowledge, approve)⁴ (vipa). What I do not wish⁵ (vipa), that I practise⁶ (vipa). But what I hate (or prefer the least)⁷ (vipa), that I do⁸ (vipa).

(1) The law is spiritual, but the Christian is still unspiritual (7:14). The law is always spiritual, because it reveals God's nature and will, which is holy, righteous and good (7:12).

The Christian as to his sinful nature is unspiritual, because his sinful nature does not and cannot by itself subject itself to God and God's will. The Christian still experiences the reality, presence and power of indwelling sin. He approves of God's law, but denounces his indwelling sin.

¹ G: oida

² G: pipraskó

³ G: katergazomai

⁴ G: ginóskó

⁵ G: theló

⁶ G: prassó

⁷ G: miseó

⁸ G: poió

By using the word 'unspiritual', Paul does not say that the Christian is still not born-again, but says that the Christian is still imperfect: the opposite of what the law demands, namely, to be spiritual (to be absolutely complete and perfect)! Because the Christian as to his sinful nature is still unspiritual and still does things that are unrighteous, unholy and evil, the law cannot sanctify the Christian.

The Christian is regenerated. In John 8:34 Jesus says, "Everyone who sins is a slave to sin." In John 8:33-36, *the non-Christian only has a sinful nature*. He is a complete slave of his master (lord), 'sin', and cannot but subject himself as a slave to that master. He is compelled to obey his master, called 'sin'. Paul teaches something different in Romans 7:14 than Jesus in John 8:34. Here *the Christian has a regenerated nature and a sinful nature that oppose one another*. He had been sold to sin (when he fell into sin together with the whole human race), but now (after he became a Christian), he rejects 'sin' as his master (lord)! Although he is no longer a slave to sin (6:6), he nevertheless continues to experience the negative effect of the fall of the whole human race into sin on his Christian life.

There are two realities in the Christian: his old sinful nature (the flesh) and his new regenerated nature (the mind). The Christian lives in a world where two realities overlap one another. On the one hand he is still a member of the fallen human race: he had been sold to sin in the past and this still has a negative effect on his life, but he no longer acknowledges sin as his lord. On the other hand he has been born-again: he is a new man, a new creation⁹. He has two realities in his human nature: The one reality is called *the flesh* (7:18), that is, *his old sinful nature*, which is imperfect, weak and transitory. The other aspect is called *the mind*, (7:22,25), that is, *his new regenerate nature*, which is controlled by the Holy Spirit¹⁰ and by God's moral law from within¹¹. Both his sinful nature and his regenerate nature dwell in his spirit (soul) and in his body.

Romans 7:14-25 describes the conflict between the Christian's old sinful nature which he derived from Adam and his new regenerate nature which he derived from Christ (cf. 5:17-19). "For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit desires what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other so that you do not do what you want¹²." Both King David¹³ and the tax collector¹⁴ experienced this conflict.

The Christian is a sinner-saint. In the past Paul was only a sinner (not born again)¹⁵. In the future he will be only a perfect and glorified saint¹⁶. But in the present between his regeneration (the beginning of his Christian life) and his physical death (the end of his life on earth) he is at the same time a sinner and a saint. The fall of mankind into sin and its consequences (especially the powerful onslaughts of his sinful human nature on his regenerated nature) continue to have an effect on the Christian until his physical death or until the second coming of Christ. Paul experiences life as if he has been sold (as a slave) to the realm where sin is a very formidable power.

The Christian has a perfect state, but not yet a perfect style. The Christian is perfectly righteous and holy *with regard to his state (position) in Christ*, but he is not yet perfectly righteous and holy *with regard to his life-style (behaviour) in this present world*. By his death and resurrection from the dead Jesus Christ himself has become and now is the righteousness and holiness and redemption of the Christian¹⁷. Jesus Christ 'redeemed' the Christian (3:24). 'Redemption'¹⁸ means the buying back of a slave or a captive, that is, making him free by the payment of a ransom¹⁹.

But the Christian is not yet always righteous and completely holy in his thoughts, motives, attitudes, words and deeds in this present world. He still commits sins²⁰, but does *not keep on sinning* and *cannot continue to sin* as someone who has not yet been born again²¹. The Christian lives among people belonging to the evil world, where Satan controls people. He is surrounded by godlessness, wickedness, corruption, violence, immortality and deception.

The Christian is in the world, but not of the world. God has rescued the believer in Christ from the dominion of darkness and has brought him into the Kingdom of his Son, Jesus Christ²². The Christian no longer belongs to the dominion of Satan, but to the Kingdom (kingship, sovereign reign) of Christ. He still lives in the sinful world, but is not

⁹ 2 Corinthians 5:17

¹⁰ Galatians 5:16

¹¹ Hebrews 8:10

¹² Galatians 5:17

¹³ Psalm 51:3-15

¹⁴ Luke 18:13-14

¹⁵ John 3:3

¹⁶ 1 John 3:2

¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 1:30; Ephesians 2:4-7

¹⁸ G: apolutrósís

¹⁹ G: lutron. Mark 10:45; 2 Corinthians 5:21

²⁰ 1 John 1:8-10; 2:1-2

²¹ 1 John 3:6-9

²² Colossians 1:13

of the sinful world²³. He now belongs to God and to the born again world, where Christ rules as King, where God keeps him safe and where Satan cannot harm him²⁴.

²³ John 17:11,14

²⁴ 1 John 5:19-20; Matthew 13:36-43,47-50

(2) The difference between being ‘in the flesh’ and being ‘unspiritual’.

All non-Christians are in the flesh. A person who is only ‘in the flesh’²⁵, that is, controlled only by his sinful nature, does not have the Holy Spirit living in him (8:7-10). He is unregenerate (not born again). Although the non-Christian chose to be a slave of his sinful nature and set himself at the disposal of his sinful nature (6:16), he cannot choose to be free from his sinful nature. He irresistibly offers the members of his body as instruments to serve unrighteousness and unholiness. He *does not* submit to God and God’s will. He *cannot* even submit to God and God’s will. He *cannot* please God at all. Thus, to be only ‘in the flesh’ is to be unregenerate.

All Christians are unspiritual as to their sinful nature. Every Christian has as it were two natures: a sinful nature that causes him to be unspiritual and a regenerate nature that causes him to be spiritual. The law is spiritual²⁶, but a Christian as to his sinful nature is unspiritual, carnal²⁷, that is, the opposite of what the (perfect) law is (7:14). The law reveals the holy, righteous and good will of God (7:12), but a Christian as to his sinful nature still does unrighteous, unholy and evil things. The Christian knows that in his sinful nature there is nothing that is morally good or beneficial (7:18). The sinful nature of the Christian causes him to often do the things which he hates, and to neglect doing the things which he loves. The unspiritual nature is most evident in a Christian that has not grown²⁸.

All Christians are spiritual as to their regenerate nature. The regenerate nature of the Christian is also called his ‘mind’ (7:23). It refers to him as a person who *has the mind or way of thinking of Jesus Christ*²⁹. The Holy Spirit lives in him and wages war against his sinful nature³⁰. His regenerate nature is his righteous and holy state in Jesus Christ (cf. 5:18; 6:4-8)³¹. It is the reality of the Holy Spirit living in him³². It lives its life in accordance to God’s revealed will in the Bible and is able to discern and make judgments between good and evil³³. The spiritual nature of Christians is most evident in a Christian that has grown to spiritual maturity³⁴.

All Christians are sinner-saints that will become glorified saints. Before regeneration, a non-Christian is only a sinner (5:8). After regeneration, a Christian is ‘a sinner-saint’ (chapter 7). But in the future, at the second coming of Christ, a Christian will be a glorified saint (8:30)³⁵! Thus, in the period between regeneration (the beginning of his transformation) and final glorification (the completion of his transformation) the Christian experiences a constant war between his sinful nature and his regenerate nature. In this life the Christian is a walking civil war³⁶! However, the fact that the Christian experience this conflict between their sinful nature and his regenerate nature is a proof that he is born-again!

(3) What is the difference between ‘being a slave to sin and ‘being sold to sin’?

The non-Christian is a slave to sin during his unregenerate state. Romans 6:6,16,17 and 19 teach that *before* their regeneration, all people *are* slaves (imperfect tense) to sin and *had once-for-all yielded* their members as slaves to impurity (aorist tense). They behave as people who had *voluntarily* sold themselves as slaves to sin that dwelt in their sinful nature (to do evil in the eyes of the Lord)³⁷. This is proved by the fact that in their unregenerate state they obey the wishes of their sinful nature and offer the members of their body to serve impurity and ever increasing wickedness. Because they are unregenerate, they *do not and cannot free themselves* from the dominating and enslaving power of their sinful nature. They do not submit themselves and cannot submit themselves to God and his will. They cannot please God (8:7-8). Thus, “being a slave to sin” means to still be unregenerate!

The Christian is sold to sin during his regenerate state. But *after* his regeneration the Christian has *once-for-all* been set free from the above condition of slavery to sin and has once-for-all become a slave of righteousness and a slave (servant) of God (aorist tense) (6:18,22)! *The condition of “being a slave to sin” (6:6,16,17,19) never returns!*

However, the condition of “being sold (as a slave) to be under the master ‘sin’ ” (7:14) remains a condition and an experience throughout the Christian’s life on earth. The Greek in Romans 7:14 does not say that the Christian “has (voluntarily) sold himself as a slave to sin” (aorist tense), but rather “has (at the fall of Adam into sin) been sold (as a slave) to be under sin and consequently is (until his death or the second coming of Christ) in the condition of being sold under sin” (perfect tense)! The condition of being sold (as a slave) to live in a world where sin is the master is not the same condition as actually being a slave to sin, putting oneself at the disposal of sin and yielding one’s members to serve the master sin! The condition of being a slave to sin cannot be said of the regenerate Christian.

²⁵ G: en sarki

²⁶ Greek: pneumatikos

²⁷ Greek: sarkinos

²⁸ 1 Corinthians 3:1-4

²⁹ 1 Corinthians 2:16

³⁰ Galatians 5:17

³¹ 1 Corinthians 1:30

³² Psalm 51:10-11

³³ 1 Corinthians 2:15

³⁴ Hebrews 5:14

³⁵ 1 John 3:1-3

³⁶ Galatians 5:16-18

³⁷ 1 Kings 21:20; 2 Kings 17:17

Romans 7:14-26 is best explained by its parallel passage in Galatians 5:16-26. Galatians 5:16-17 says, “Live by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.”

The Bible teaches that the born-again Christian is *not yet perfect*. Time and again there is a conflict in the Christian. He still lives in his present weak body, which is subject to his sinful nature. *And this sinful nature attacks him again and again and so severely that he does not always do what he really desires to do*. Nevertheless, the Christian has something, which the non-Christian does not have, namely, the Holy Spirit living in him! The non-Christian is still a slave to his sinful nature and produces fruit for death (7:5)³⁸. The Christian is *no longer a slave* to his sinful nature, but a slave to the Holy Spirit and produces the fruit of the Spirit (7:4)³⁹. Although his sinful nature is still a powerful reality in him (7:14-26), the Christian has crucified his sinful nature with its fruit (sinful passions and desires)⁴⁰. The Christian has made a definite break with living as a slave in his sinful nature. The Christian has stopped obeying the old master ‘sin’ and now obeys the sovereign Master God, even when he lives in a world where ‘sin’ is the master of non-Christians. The Christian has been transferred from the dominion of darkness to the Kingdom of Christ⁴¹. The Christian wants to, can and will live the new life in his regenerate nature, even when he has to constantly fight the onslaughts of his sinful nature. To put this in another way: the Christian submits himself willingly to the reign of Christ through the Holy Spirit to live the new life in dependence of the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit. *The Christian is in the process of practising what he already is in principle. To put it in yet another way: the Holy Spirit is in the process of applying the righteousness and holiness of Jesus Christ to the life of the Christian*⁴².

‘The law of sin’ is the old depraved and sinful nature still at work in the members of the Christian’s body, *continually waging war* (present tense) against him and *again and again* making him a prisoner (present tense) of himself.

Likewise, after Adam fell into sin (perfect tense), the Christian “is sold (as a slave) and is consequently condemned to involuntarily live (as a slave) under the master, ‘sin’, within this present sinful world (7:14), even though he himself does not acknowledge ‘sin’ as his lord, but Christ as his Lord. To put this in another way: *the Christian “is time and again made a prisoner (present tense) of the sinful nature (the law of sin) that works within the members of his body” (7:23). The Christian is thus the passive subject to a power that is alien to his will and from which he cannot free himself. He acknowledges that his sinful nature is still a present reality and still exercises a powerful influence over him. He is involuntarily subjected to the forceful operation of his sinful nature*. This is proved by the fact that he time and again does things, which he does not want to do (7:15), and often cannot do what is good (7:18). Thus, as in Galatians 5:17, the Christian experiences a powerful spiritual and moral conflict raging in the members of his present body, in which the dictates of the sinful nature opposes the dictates of the Holy Spirit (7:23).

However, like Galatians 5:22-25, Romans 8:12-14 teaches that through the Holy Spirit living in him, the Christian does not have to live according to the sinful nature and can put the fruit of the sinful nature to death. Through the power of the Holy Spirit living in him the Christian *can again and again* resist his own sinful nature and do what he really desires to do, which is, what God wants him to do.

But because the Christian has a sinful nature until his physical death, he *often* cannot resist the evil influence of his sinful nature and cannot do what he really wants to do. Although the Christian is spiritually and morally regenerate and is under the dominion of the Holy Spirit, he is still spiritually and morally influenced by his own sinful nature. As long as the Christian lives in ‘the body of death’ (his present physical body), his sinful nature will also be present and the control of the Holy Spirit will not yet be perfect or total in him. *That is why the Christian needs to be filled with the Spirit again and again*⁴³, *that is, again and again he needs to submit himself completely to be conditioned, controlled and dominated by the Holy Spirit*.

(4) The law is good, but the Christian cannot do the perfect good (7:15).

The Christian falls far short of God’s standard of perfection. Paul’s spiritual and moral goal is nothing less than perfection⁴⁴. But at the end of each day when Paul evaluates his life, he realises that he falls far short of God’s standard of perfection and loathes the evil things he has done. God in Christ has done so much for him and yet he could do so little in return. Everything he did or accomplished that day is tainted with sin. He realises that his goal is much higher than his actual performance! He admits that the moral law of God simply cannot make him holy, righteous or good. Also the (moral, humanist, anthroposophical) standards he sets for himself cannot make him holy, righteous or good.

³⁸ Galatians 5:19-21

³⁹ Galatians 5:22-25

⁴⁰ Galatians 5:24

⁴¹ Colossians 1:13

⁴² cf. 1 Corinthians 1:30

⁴³ Ephesians 5:18

⁴⁴ Philippians 3:12-14; Matthew 5:48; Hebrews 12:14

The Christian is a walking civil war. The flesh, which is the old sinful nature in the Christian, desires what is contrary to the Spirit. And the Spirit, who is already present in the Christian, desires what is contrary to the sinful nature. These two realities are in conflict with each other, so that the Christian *again and again* does what he does not wish⁴⁵ to do⁴⁶. The Christian is a walking civil war. Paul does not say that he cannot do anything good, but that he cannot do *the perfect good* which he wishes to do.

The Christian fails to do the perfect good. He cannot do the perfect good. This is not due to the nature of the moral law, but due to the sinful nature, which still dwells in the Christian. While the non-Christian *voluntarily yields* himself again and again (present tense) to be a slave of his sinful nature (6:16), the Christian has *involuntarily been sold and remains sold* (perfect tense) to his sinful nature (as long as he lives in his body on this earth). The Christian does not willingly give himself to the service of sin, but his sinful nature is in the position of a sold person, whose acts are not always the evidence of his inner inclination (7:14). The Christian often wants to do what is good, but his sinful nature works so forcefully against him that he does what is evil instead. It is because of the presence of the sinful nature in the Christian, that he often does what he hates and omits to do what he approves.

b. The law cannot destroy the sinful nature (7:16-20)

7:16. But if what I do not wish (to do)(vipa), that I do (vipa), I agree (vipa) that the (moral) law (is) good.

7:17. But now (this being so) it is no longer I who accomplish (vipn) this, but the sin dwelling (vppa) in me.

7:18. For I know⁴⁷ (vira) that nothing good lives (vipa) in me, that is (vipa), in my flesh (sinful nature). For the desire (vnpa) (to do what is good) lies alongside (in wait) for me⁴⁸ (vipn), but the carrying it out (accomplishing it)(vnpn) not.

7:19. For the good I wish (to do)(vipa) I do not do (vipa), but the evil I do not wish (to do)(vipa) this I *keep on practising* (vipa).

7:20. But if what I do not wish (to do)(vipa) I *keep on doing* (vipa), it is no longer I who am carrying (vipn) this out⁴⁹, but the sin *continually* dwelling (vppa) in me.

Paul says that although the Christian hates his transgressions of God's moral law, he still admits that God's moral law is good.

Paul says that the sinful acts, which the Christian does, are no longer the criterion of the real character of the Christian. His sinful acts are indeed his own acts. But when these sinful acts are not performed with the full agreement of his regenerated nature, they no longer show the complete human nature of the Christian or the real state of the Christian.

Paul concludes that the sinful acts, which the Christian often does, only confirm that nothing spiritually or morally good or beneficial lives in his sinful human nature. Although the moral law commands what a Christian should do and the regenerate nature of the Christian desires to do what the moral law commands, the moral law simply cannot destroy the sinful nature in the Christian! Whenever God commands that a particular evil should not be done, God's moral command does not automatically destroy the inclination in the Christian to do that evil thing.

Conclusion. The moral law or Ten Commandments cannot help the Christian in the struggle between his sinful nature and his regenerate nature. The moral law simply cannot make the Christian holy, righteous or good.

c. The indwelling sin is a power from which a believer cannot deliver himself (7:21-23).

7:21. So I discover (vipa) this law (this unbending rule or principle at work): when the wish (vppa) to do good (vnpa) (is there) for me, then evil lies in wait (vipn) for me. (i.e. when I wish to do good evil lies at the door).

7:22. For I *always* delight (vipn) in the (moral) law of God according to my inner man.

7:23. But I see (vipa) another law at work in my members, *continually* waging war against (vppm) the law of my mind and *again and again* making me a prisoner (of war)(vppa) of the law of sin which is *always* (vppa) (at work) within my members.

In Romans 7:21-25, Paul states his final conclusion. *The struggle of the Christian is between his sinful nature which he derived from Adam and his regenerate nature which he derived from Christ.*

The word 'law' in this passage is used in four senses:

- The unbending rule/principle (7:21)
- God's righteous requirement (7:22)
- The law of my mind, the regenerated nature (7:23a)
- The law of sin, the sinful nature (7:23b)

⁴⁵ G: theló

⁴⁶ Galatians 5:17

⁴⁷ G: oida

⁴⁸ G: para-keimai

⁴⁹ G: kat-ergazomai

The Christian experiences sin as a constant enemy lying in wait to attack (7:21). Paul summarises Romans 7:14-20 as follows: Paul is not forced to give in to evil lying at his doorstep, but the evil old nature in him is certainly not sleeping. After his regeneration his indwelling sin sprang to life and has the sinful world⁵⁰ and Satan⁵¹ as its allies. It continually looks for a way to turn a good deed into an evil deed. Compare sin lying in wait at the door of Cain⁵² and Satan who is continually on the look out to attack believers⁵³.

The Christian delights in God's righteous requirement (7:22). With his whole inner being the Christian delights in God's law in the sense of God's holy and righteous requirement, which is revealed in God's moral law. Jesus Christ summarises God's holy and righteous requirement as: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. Love your neighbour as yourself⁵⁴." This law is not intended to be the means of justification, but as the rule which should govern the life of the Christian.

The Christian is still a prisoner of his own sinful nature (7:23). 'The law of sin' is the old depraved and sinful nature. It is able to conquer the Christian! It can take the spirit and body of the Christian captive and make them subject to its powerful corrupt influence. The power of the sinful nature is still so great, that the Christian cannot resist it with his own will power or effort (cf. 7:15,23). The Christian does not become the willing servant of his sinful nature, but rather its miserable victim. *The Christian is 'a prisoner of war' of an indwelling enemy, namely, his own sinful nature. As long as the Christian still lives in his present physical body, he remains the unwilling and reluctant servant of his own sinful nature.*

The Christian acknowledges Jesus as his Lord and renounces his indwelling sin as lord. By living by the Holy Spirit, the Christian will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature⁵⁵. *However, as long as the Christian lives in his present physical body, his sinful nature will be present and the control of the Holy Spirit will never be perfect or total in him. No Christian is all the time Spirit-filled and therefore he is commanded: "Be again and again filled with the Spirit"⁵⁶. No Christian reaches perfection here on earth and that is why he is exhorted: "Be perfect (future tense) as your heavenly Father is perfect"⁵⁷.*

The Christian is a walking civil war between the indwelling sin and the indwelling Spirit. 'The law of the mind' is the regenerated nature of the Christian. The Christian experiences a civil war in him between the law of sin and the law of his mind. This is the civil war between his indwelling sin and the indwelling Holy Spirit⁵⁸. *The fact that the Christian experiences a spiritual war in the members of his body is the proof that he is genuinely born-again!* A non-Christian does not experience this spiritual struggle! The spiritual struggle consists of the realisation that he does not always do what he wishes to do and that he sometimes does what he does not wish to do (7:19). The Christian delights in God's moral law, but at the same time loathes the sins he commits (7:15,20).

d. Only Jesus Christ can rescue the believer from this body of death (7:24-25).

7:24. Wretched (miserable) man that I (am)! Who will rescue (vifd) me from this body of death?

7:25. Thanks (be) to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then⁵⁹, I myself with my mind serve as a slave (vipa) the law of God, but with the flesh (my sinful nature) (serve as a slave) the law of sin.

What is the difference between 'the body of sin' and 'the body of death'?

The apostle Paul uses four terms connected to the body. Although there is a connection between these four terms, they also have differences.

- The body of sin in Romans 6:6. 'The body of sin' is *the physical body of the unregenerate unbeliever*. It is the physical body of the non-Christian, which is indwelt, conditioned, controlled and dominated by his sinful or depraved nature and which voluntarily, yet irresistibly, serves impurity and ever increasing wickedness as a slave. *When he becomes a believer in Christ, he is set free from this body of sin* (6:6,18,22). Nevertheless, his physical body still remains a body of death and a body of humiliation.
- The body of death in Romans 7:24. 'The body of death' is *the physical body of the regenerate believer*. It is the physical body of the Christian, which is still indwelt by his sinful nature, which however is no longer his master, but is now also indwelt by his regenerate nature (the Holy Spirit), who has become his Master. It is the physical body of the Christian, which often involuntarily and irresistibly still yields to sin. As a consequence, the sinful or depraved nature (the law of sin)(7:21,23), which still dwells in the soul and body of the Christian, still continues to produce

⁵⁰ 1 John 2:15-17

⁵¹ 1 Peter 5:8

⁵² Genesis 4:7

⁵³ 1 Peter 5:8

⁵⁴ Mark 12:30-31

⁵⁵ Galatians 5:16

⁵⁶ Ephesians 5:18

⁵⁷ Matthew 5:48

⁵⁸ Galatians 5:17

⁵⁹ G: ara oun

spiritual and especially physical death. That is why it is called the body of death. The born-again Christian can and does still fall into sin⁶⁰, but can no longer and does no longer dwell in sin⁶¹!

- **The body of humiliation** in Philippians 3:21. ‘The body of humiliation’ is *the physical body of the believer before his resurrection from the dead*. It is the physical body of the Christian, which is still subjected to physical death. It means the same as the body of death. The last enemy that Christ will destroy is ‘death’⁶², that is, the body of death or the body of humiliation.
- **The body of glory** in Philippians 3:21. ‘The body of glory’ is *the physical body of the believer after his resurrection from the dead*. It is the physical body of the Christian after the second coming of Christ. Only at his second coming, Jesus Christ will use his all-controlling power to transform the body of humiliation of the believer into the body of glory, which will be like his (Christ’s) own glorious resurrected physical body!

The Christian still lives in a body of death. Paul cries this out. ‘The body of death’ is the Christian’s physical body at the present time. His body is still the sphere where his sinful nature operates most specifically. The members of his physical body (his eyes, tongue, hands and feet, etc) are still the instruments of his sinful nature to do sin. His body is subject to the ravages of the indwelling sin and causes spiritual death and finally physical death.

But the present body of the Christian will be transformed to become like the glorious resurrected body of Jesus Christ at the resurrection of the body⁶³.

Christ rescues the Christian from the forceful operation of his sinful nature. But Paul finally exclaims that while the moral law can never make an end to this spiritual conflict, Jesus Christ can, will and does! The moral law can only cause the Christian to become acutely aware of his helplessness, powerlessness and depravity and spur (drive) him on to seek victory where it can only be found, namely, with Jesus Christ⁶⁴. Only Jesus Christ will again and again rescue the Christian from the forceful operation of his sinful nature.

The Christian will not only receive the righteousness of Christ, but also the holiness of Christ, which is, victory over the power and depravity of sin. God gives this victory more and more in the present time and perfectly in the future eternity. This is God’s grace in Christ Jesus!

Paul says that the Christian has two natures: the old sinful nature (the indwelling sin) and the regenerated nature within him which cannot be separated from each other until physical death or Christ’s second coming. With his mind (his regenerated nature) the Christian willingly serves God’s moral law, but with his flesh (his sinful nature) he completely unwillingly serves the law of sin.

The flesh (the old sinful nature, the indwelling sin) remains an unwelcome intruder and an illegal colonist in the body of the Christian. Paul does not deny that he is responsible for his sinful thoughts, motives, attitudes, words and deeds. But Paul realises that the real and deepest cause for the fact that the Christian can still fall into sin and actually still commits sin is his sinful nature. He maintains that the Christian does not serve the indwelling sin willingly, but that *the indwelling sin is a power from which the Christian cannot deliver himself*.

Paul does not resign himself to this condition, because he is deeply convinced that only Jesus Christ can deliver him from sin. Jesus Christ has already justified (forgiven) him from all sin in the past, present and future (cf. 6:6-7). Now Jesus Christ is in the process of sanctifying him from all sin in the present. This sanctifying process has its ups and downs and is a continuous struggle.

The future tenses in verse 24 and 25 emphasise certainty: In the present time Jesus Christ will *certainly rescue the Christian again and again* from the forceful operation of his sinful nature. And in the future at his second coming he will *certainly, completely and forever rescue* them from his sinful nature.

The Christian must make war against his sinful nature and make an end to his misdeeds. The struggle of the Christian is between *his sinful nature* which he derived from Adam and *his regenerate nature* which he derived from Christ. His sinful nature is a power from which he cannot free himself. *Time and again* the Christian serves like a slave (present tense) his sinful nature.

Not God’s law, but God’s grace gives the Christian victory in his struggle against sin in his sinful nature and enables him to live the new and holy life in spite of the presence of his sinful nature! Not the law, but Christ redeemed the Christian from the curse of the law⁶⁵ and set him free from the dominating power of his sinful nature with its corrupt influences (6:6-7; 8:1-2)⁶⁶.

⁶⁰ 1 John 1:8-10; 2:1-2

⁶¹ 1 John 3:6-9

⁶² 1 Corinthians 15:26

⁶³ Philippians 3:21

⁶⁴ Galatians 3:24

⁶⁵ Galatians 3:10-13

⁶⁶ Galatians 3:14

The regenerate nature of the Christian is also a power, because nothing less than the Holy Spirit lives in him⁶⁷! Therefore, the Christian will certainly *again and again* serve God's moral law like a slave (present tense).

But Paul is also deeply convinced that he has a personal responsibility to fight against the indwelling sin and to put the misdeeds of indwelling sin to death by the power of the Holy Spirit (8:13)⁶⁸. The best thing to do when the sinful nature attacks is to immediately pray to Jesus Christ and put yourself under his loving authority and protection.

⁶⁷ cf. 1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19-20

⁶⁸ Galatians 5:16-26

(IV) 7:14-25. The phase of Paul's personal experience portrayed in this passage.

Is Romans 7:14-25 the experience of an unregenerate person or of a regenerate person?

There are people who argue that Romans 7:14-25 cannot be the experience of a born-again believer. They base their argument on Paul's statement, "I am unspiritual" (7:14) and on the contrast between Romans 7 on the one hand and Romans 6 and 8 on the other hand.

What evidence is there to support the conclusion that Romans 7:14-25 describes the experience of a regenerate believer and not of an unregenerate unbeliever?

a. Paul's statement in Romans 7:24 about himself is humble and realistic.

As a born-again believer Paul describes himself as "the least of the apostles"⁶⁹, as "the least of all God's people"⁷⁰ and as "the worst of sinners"⁷¹. So when Paul describes himself as "a wretched man" (7:24) this is quite in line with these other humble and self-incriminating statements about himself. He is a wretched man as long as he is not yet completely saved from his depraved nature. This will only happen when he sees Jesus Christ face to face⁷².

b. Paul's statements in Romans 7:14-25 are more likely a description of a regenerate believer than an unregenerate unbeliever.

It is unlikely that an unregenerate person would say, "I agree that God's law is good" (7:16,22), "I do not approve of sin, I hate sin and deeply regret my sins" (7:15,19,24) and "I wish to do what is good" (7:18,19,21). It is unlikely that an unregenerate person would thank God, through Jesus Christ, as Paul is doing (7:25)⁷³.

c. Paul's statements in Romans 7:14-25 do not contradict his statements about the regenerate believer in Romans 6:6-7,18,22.

The physical death and resurrection of Jesus Christ was a once-for-all decisive event in the history of this world (6:2-7). Likewise, the spiritual death and resurrection of Christians in solidarity with Christ is a once-for-all decisive event in their personal history.

In Romans 4:2-5, 'justification' (in the sense of imputing, reckoning or ascribing righteousness) is *the legal act* by which God reckons the righteousness of Christ to the believer and thus regards and treats the believer as completely righteous in his sight. The sins of the believer in the past, present and future have been completely forgiven!

In Romans 6:6-7, 'sanctification' (in the sense of imputing, reckoning or ascribing holiness) is also *a legal act* by which God reckons the holiness of Christ to the believer and thus regards and treats the believer as completely holy in his sight⁷⁴. The crucifixion of the old self in solidarity with the crucifixion of Christ results in delivering the believer from his body of sin and setting him free from the slavery to sin. 'The body of sin' is the physical body which he possessed as a non-believer. It was a body that was conditioned, controlled and dominated by his sinful or depraved nature. It was a body that irresistibly served godlessness and wickedness as a slave. Also this was a once-for-all decisive event (6:6).

It would then appear that Christians have been completely and perfectly sanctified, that is, that their body of sin and their slavery to sin has been completely removed from them, that they no more have a physical body that is conditioned, controlled and dominated by their sinful nature and that they are completely free to serve righteousness. However, the letter to the Romans chapters 6 to 8 teaches more.

Romans 8:3 says, "God once-for-all *doomed* sin in the flesh", that is, God pronounced his sentence on sin in the unregenerate nature. This is *a legal act* concerning *the state* of the believer. But God's pronouncement of judgement (the legal act) always includes putting that judgement into effect. This is a *continuous ethical act* concerning *the process* of the believer.

Thus, righteousness and holiness do not only have a *legal* aspect which is called 'justification', but also an *ethical* aspect which is called 'sanctification'. The forensic aspect emphasises *the state* of being righteous and holy before God, while the ethical aspect emphasises *the process* of becoming more and more what the believer already is in Christ, that is, becoming more and more righteous and holy in soul and body on earth.

God's condemnation of sin always includes the doom of sin, that is, the execution of that sentence by delivering a person from both the guilt of sin and the power of sin. He continues throughout life to deliver the believer from the power of their sinful nature until he finally delivers him from the presence of sin at the end of his life. The result is that at the present time, the sinful nature in the believer has lost its *absolute* power and cannot continue to bind the Christian to itself anymore.

⁶⁹ 1 Corinthians 15:9

⁷⁰ Ephesians 3:8

⁷¹ 1 Timothy 1:15

⁷² 1 John 3:1-3; Philippians 3:8-14

⁷³ cf. 1 Corinthians 12:3

⁷⁴ 1 Corinthians 1:30

In the future at the second coming of Christ the sinful nature in believers still living on earth will lose all its power forever! The resurrected body will be a spiritual body, a body completely governed (conditioned, controlled and dominated) by the Holy Spirit⁷⁵!

The physical body of the Christian is therefore no longer *completely* conditioned, controlled and dominated by his sinful nature. The involuntary choice before regeneration to be a slave to sin has become a voluntary choice after regeneration to be a slave of righteousness (6:16-18) and thus, the believer in Christ has been set free from the *total dominion* of his sinful nature.

Certainly, Romans 6 pictures the Christian as having died to the power of the sinful nature and having the ability and devotion to live the new and holy life. However, nowhere in Romans 6 or elsewhere in the Bible is it stated or implied that the Christian has been *completely delivered* from his struggle against his sinful nature! Romans 6:12,13 and 19 clearly refers to this *ongoing struggle* between the Christian's regenerate nature and his sinful nature⁷⁶. Also Romans 8:13 teaches that throughout his life on earth the Christian *continues* to put to death the misdeeds of the body by the Holy Spirit living in him.

d. The complete picture from the letter to the Romans is that the Christian is 'a sinner-saint'.

The Christian cannot lead an absolute sinless life. On the one hand, the believer is an involuntary prisoner of only the one aspect of his human nature, that is, he is a prisoner of his sinful nature (7:14,23). He is still "sold under sin". *His sinful nature still has such a control over his life that he cannot lead an absolute sinless life*⁷⁷.

The sinful or depraved nature is still a power that wants to coerce and control the believer (7:21,23,25). Time and again the sinful nature attacks and opposes the Holy Spirit living in the believer and tries to drag the believer back into his old life-style (7:23a)⁷⁸. Often the sinful nature (law of sin) makes the believer a prisoner of itself (7:23b). The sinful nature is so powerful that the believer cannot resist it with his own will power or effort. Paul does not say that the sinful nature always conquers the believer or that the believer can only live a defeated life. He says that the sinful or depraved nature of man is a power from which man cannot free himself and which at times (not always) conquers man in spite of the fact that man does not intend his sinful nature to conquer.

The Christian cannot lead an absolute sinful life. On the other hand, the believer is the voluntary servant of the other aspect of his human nature, that is, he is the wholehearted servant of his regenerate nature (6:17-18). *His regenerate nature has such a control over his life that he cannot lead an absolute sinful life anymore.*

The born-again believer "has once for all died to sin" (aorist tense)(6:2), "has forever been justified from sin" (perfect tense)(6:7), "has once for all been set free from sin" (aorist tense)(6:18,22) and "has once for all become a slave to righteousness" (aorist tense)(6:18) and "a slave to God" (aorist tense)(6:22). These are all decisive events. The believer is commanded to continually regard himself dead to sin and alive to God (present tense, a command)(6:11). He is commanded never to allow sin to be his master or lord (present tense, a command) (6:12). He is commanded never to present the members of his body as weapons of unrighteousness to sin (present tense, a command) (6:13), but commanded to present the members of his body once for all as weapons of righteousness to God (aorist tense, a command) (6:13) and as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness (aorist tense, a command) (6:19). The dominating position and power of his sinful nature has been broken. *Although time and again he does fall into committing sins (7:14-26), he cannot, does not want to and will not continue to live in sin (chapter 6)*⁷⁹!

The Christian is a sinner-saint. Although Satan, the sinful world and the sinful nature in man try with all their might and trickery to keep Christians from doing what is right, they *cannot stop the believer throughout* from doing right and growing in holiness!

They *cannot completely prevent* him from experiencing victory over sins and peace that surpasses all understanding! While the wages of continually living in sin is death, justification leads to more and more holy living and results in eternal life (6:22-23)! *This sense of victory, which the Christian now possesses in principle, he will possess in perfection in the future.* It is this knowledge and assurance which sustains Christians in all their struggles!

With regard to his *position (state) in Christ* a Christian is already a saint. The perfect righteousness and holiness of Christ has already been reckoned (imputed) to him. He has been separated from the godless and wicked world and dedicated to belong to God.

With regard to his *process of growth (style of life) in Christ* a Christian is not yet perfectly righteous or holy in his thoughts, motives, attitudes, words and deeds. The Christian is perfectly righteous and holy in his position in Christ⁸⁰, but not yet perfectly righteous and holy in his Christian walk⁸¹. The Christian is a sinner-saint.

⁷⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:44,50

⁷⁶ Jeremiah 17:9; Matthew 6:12-13; 1 John 1:8-10; 2:1-2

⁷⁷ Matthew 6:12; 1 John 1:8-10; 2:1-2

⁷⁸ cf. Galatians 5:17

⁷⁹ 1 John 3:6,8-9

⁸⁰ cf. 1 Corinthians 1:30

⁸¹ cf. 1 Peter 1:15-16

e. Paul's statements in Romans 7:14-25 are completely opposite to his statements about unregenerate people in Romans 7:5,9a.

Romans 7:5a and 9a use *the past tense* and describe an unregenerate unbeliever in the past: "We were in the flesh (lived in the sinful nature)" and "we bore fruit for death" (7:5)⁸². In the past Paul was alive apart from the law and gave no serious attention to God's law. So the law did not arouse sinful desires in his sinful nature and he lived an undisturbed self-sufficient and self-righteous life, unafraid of God's punishment for sins (7:9a)!

But Romans 7:14-25 uses *the present tense* and describes the regenerate believer in the present. Paul calls Jesus Christ his Lord (7:24), describes the spiritual struggle of the believer as long as he still lives in his present mortal body on this earth⁸³ and expects to be delivered from his present lowly body (7:24)⁸⁴.

f. Paul's statements in Romans 7:14-25 are completely opposite to his statements about unregenerate people in Romans 8:5-8.

Romans 8:7-8 describes the unregenerate unbeliever and says, "The mind set on the flesh is *continually* hostile to God. It does not submit to the law of God and cannot submit to the law of God. It is never able to please God." The depraved nature of the unbeliever *continually* rules over his life.

But Romans 8:5-6 describes the regenerate believer and says, "Those who *continually* live according to the Spirit, set their minds on the things of the Spirit. And the mind of the Spirit is life and peace." The regenerate believer is born-again by the Holy Spirit, occupies himself with the things of the Spirit⁸⁵ and experiences the new life and peace with God.

Likewise in Romans 7:14-25 the regenerate believer agrees with God's moral law (7:16), delights in God's moral law (7:22) and serves in the new way of the Spirit (7:6)⁸⁶. While the unregenerate unbeliever hates God (8:7), the regenerate believer hates the evil which he does (7:15)!

Conclusion.

It is clear that in Romans 7:14-25, Paul describes how great the weakness of the Christian is. In order to be sanctified, the Christian needs a much greater power outside himself than his sinful nature inside himself. He needs no one less than Jesus Christ who once for all earned the legal position of perfect righteousness and holiness of regenerate believers before God. And he needs no one less than the Spirit of Christ (the Holy Spirit) who continually applies this righteousness and holiness in the ethical process called sanctification to the personal lives of believers.

Therefore Romans 7:7-13 most likely describes Paul's experience *just before, during and shortly after* his conversion!

⁸² Galatians 5:19-21

⁸³ cf. Galatians 5:16-23

⁸⁴ cf. Philippians 3:21

⁸⁵ cf. Colossians 3:1-4

⁸⁶ cf. John 4:23-24