

## 2. The Sinner-saint according to Romans 7.14-25 pt2

April 21, 2013

### Introduction

Romans 7.14 is transitional to the rest of the chapter, which explains what the apostle means by being **under sin** and **fleshly** at the same time that he gives more defense of God's law.

### I. Paul's bewildering dislike of his actions, 15

#### A. He states his bewilderment

**For I do not understand my own actions** (15a). I do not "know," that is, love or take delight in my actions (my doings). He is elaborating on the indictment of himself he just gave (14).

#### B. He explains his bewilderment

**For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate** (15b). I am bewildered and dislike my actions because of two things: what I do not do and what I do.

#### 1) First, I do *not* do **what I want**

I dislike my actions due to my failure to follow through in doing what I want. This is more than wish or weak desire. It is strong desire of will, "Determined resolution" (Murray 262). I fail in my commitments and that leaves me with a bewildering dislike of my actions.

#### 2) Second, I do **the very thing I hate**

When it comes to follow through on my determined resolutions and commitments, I end up doing the opposite of my delight; I do what I hate. The doings in view are very general so far but we get the picture of Paul's bewilderment about his actions.

### II. Paul's core interest underlying his actions, 16

**Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good.** This is a tightly knit argument that suppresses a premise and a conclusion.

Conditional is a premise: **if I do what I do not want, [then] I agree with the law, that it is good**

Second premise is "it is true that **I do what I do not want** [I do what I hate; I want differently]"

Conclusion: **I agree with the law, that it is good**

Thus, Paul opens up the full contextual meaning of what he wants (he wants the law as the guide of his actions). He says that doing what I do *not* want shows that I concur with the law, agree that it is good (spiritual, holy, righteous in context), and I go against my desire and commitment to it as the standard for my actions.

Thus, he says, bemoaning my sin (I do not want it), I endorse the law in a deep and "whole-souled" way (Murray 263). We get some grasp of this depth by contrasting this attitude with the attitude of the natural man: **For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot** (8.7). To agree with the law that it is good, spiritual, holy, and righteous is surely something deep in one's mindset that expresses willing submission to it. Paul shows that this submission is action oriented (it is about what I do); it is neither just attitude nor just action. He endorses the law in a whole-souled *and* practical way. Surely, then, we can understand the bewilderment of his self-reflection.

Q: is he saying that he always hates what he does? No, this is reoccurring self-reflection.

### III. Paul's conclusion regarding responsibility for his actions, 17-20 (**So now**, 17)

#### A. He appears to disown personal responsibility

It is easy to pick up this idea of dissociation: **it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.** "No longer" can mark time but also logical progression: then not or accordingly not. Thus, in the tight reasoning here, Paul says, because what I do is not what I want in the core of

my being, then “**I** do not do it.” I want the law of God so when the opposite surfaces, I am not doing it. Who does it then, or what does it? It is sin dwelling in me that does it.

2

This seems to be a clear separation of himself from the sin. It appears that responsibility for the sin is put on indwelling sin...*not on me*.

This line of thought continues to v. 20: **18For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. 19For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. 20Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.** Notice the repeat of “it is not I but sin.” Sin is the problem, not me; so it seems. There are three additional ideas that we should comment on: the matter of ability, the specifics of evil versus good, and another argument in a single verse.

### 1. Ability

Inability to carry out the law is the hallmark of those living in the flesh, but notably, they not only fail in doing it but they are hostile to God who gives it (8.7). The inability of v. 18 is a different kind of inability; it is one that pertains to a person who desires to do what is right as a core commitment deep in the soul. It is an inability of performance but not from hostility to God.

### 2. Good versus evil

What Paul wants and opposes is defined in actions. In his doings, he was unable to do the *good* he determined to do and he was unable to avoid doing the *evil* he sought to avoid.

### 3. Argument in a single verse

Like v. 16, the argument is compressed in a conditional: **Now if I do what I do not want, [then] it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.** I do what I do not want (he affirms the if part of the conditional). Therefore, it is not I but sin (the then part of the conditional is true).

### B. He does not disown personal responsibility

However, he is not saying I am not responsible but sin is the culprit. How can sin be responsible for anything? It is not a person. How does sin act? Acts are sin but sin does not do the sinning. Lying is a sin but lying does not commit sin.

### 1. That is not his point because he affirms his responsibility

All through the text, Paul owns the actions as his own: **For I do not understand my own actions** (15a). He also says, I do what I hate (15b), and I do what I do not want (16). Regarding the sin, it dwells in me (16). Also, he says, nothing good dwells *in me*, that is, in *my* flesh (18).

### 2. His point is to affirm responsibility by personifying sin

It is as if another person is present in me, another I, and that person’s name and character is sin. In this light, here is a paraphrase of verse 20 (& 17): Now I do not want to do certain things because I have a deep commitment to the God’s law as my delight, but if I do them it is not because of who I am in the new way of the Spirit (7.6) but it is because of who I am in myself in the fall. I still am flesh, fallen and prone to wander. I still have much to learn about growing in holiness. [a bird flies because of the wind; remove the wind and it is unable to do the good of flying; likewise, remove the Spirit and a Christian would be unable to do anything good]

The point is metaphorical, our sinful nature is personified. Literally, Paul is saying: “I don’t do it, but really I do it. It is not me but it is me.” This expresses the tension and conflict of doing what I don’t want, “What I hate, I do.” Unmistakably, it is I. I am responsible.

## Summary to this point in the text

In reoccurring self-reflection, Paul expresses bewildering dislike, he says, for *my* actions (15a), but this very fact (doing what I do *not* want) shows that I have deep commitment to the law. Moreover, this very fact shows that sin takes me captive to do its bidding. However, I am not disowning responsibility for the sin is in *me*; its in *my* flesh; I am the one who sins against my delight in God’s law that is deep in my soul. Unquestionably, I am responsible for what I dislike about my actions.