

2. The Sinner-saint according to Romans 7.14-25 pt3

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²¹ So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. ²² For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, ²³ but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. ²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. (Romans 7:21-25 ESV)

IV. Another conclusion, at bottom in my doing good, evil is present, 21-23

A. He draws a conclusion (**So**, v. 21)

When I want to do right, evil lies close at hand (v. 21). This conclusion flows from what he has been saying about his bewildering dislike of his actions for which he takes full responsibility, namely, **I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate** (v. 15b).

Now, put in the positive, I want to do right. However, *when* I want to do right, evil is near me; **evil is present with me** (*KJV*). This is what I find as a law, as a regular principle, a fact that I observe as a regular occurrence.

B. He grounds the conclusion (**For...but**, 22-23)

1. On one hand, I want to do right

Evidence: **I delight in the law of God, in my inner being** (v. 22). I delight in God in my inmost spirit at the center of my personal being. There is no body and spirit or matter and mind contrast. The inner man goes with his agreement with the law as to its normative goodness (v. 16). Thus, “Notwithstanding all the frustration of his determinate will to the good, [despite his bewilderment with his actions] he delights in the law of the Lord...this delight is not peripheral but belongs to that which is deepest and inmost in his moral and spiritual being” (Murray I, 266).

2. On the other hand, evil is present with me

Evidence: there is another law, a fact I observe as a regular occurrence, **but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members** (v. 23). This other law, the constant presence of evil, is personified as a person that wages war and takes captives. He does two things.

a. He attacks the law of my mind

The law of my mind is the law of God in which I delight in the depths of my being (v. 22). Evil is not just there passively; its presence is active and aggressive attacking my delight in God's law.

b. He makes me captive to the law of sin in my members

This person, evil, fights with the purpose of making me captive to sin, to be under it and guided by it (as v. 14). How does it master me and guide me around under its rule? It does so **in my members**. Again, this is not the inability of the natural man (Rom 8.7). The new idea is the reference to our physical body, to the members of the body. Our very bodies are the instruments of sin; as persons, as ensouled bodies or embodied souls (Gen 2), we sin in the body. This is how the law of sin expresses itself. Importantly, it is not merely a captivity of members but of the person: the presence of evil brings *me* into captivity to sin.

Summary of 21-23: I am in struggle and tension with a new heart for God and with evil *always* dragging at my sinful heels to such a degree that I sin in the very members of my body.

V. Paul's cry for deliverance

Some call this Paul's wail of anguish (v. 24): **Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?** He amplifies his reaction to the conflict within him, to his bewildering dislike of his own responsible actions, and to the contradiction of his deep delight in God's holy law.

He now nuances the conflict by crying out for deliverance **from this body of death** [this translation puts emphasis on the physical body characterized by death]. Again, the KJV suggests a better interpretation by translating: **the body of this death** [emphasis on death, this death that affects the physical body]. That is, *the physical body is subject to a particular kind of death, namely, death that is the wage of sin* arising from the law of sin and death in the context.

What then is the deliverance Paul seeks? He seeks bodily deliverance from the death that comes to the body as the instrument of sin (so, Murray 269). The next verse shows that this is not a cry of utter despair.

VI. Paul's triumphant thanksgiving, 25a, **Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!**

Exuberant and overjoyed at the thought, Paul forgets to state specifically that there is deliverance, who grants it, and how. Note that he does not explicitly say, "I thank God that He *delivers* me." Nor does he explicitly say, "I thank God *that He delivers me through Christ.*" He simply presupposes the fact of deliverance. His interest for the moment is to express His gratitude to God approaching Him through Christ. Of course, both the fact and the mediator of deliverance are presupposed. So, this is a triumphant thanksgiving for the goodness of God in setting sinners free from the bondage of sin and death through union with Christ in His death and resurrection as the redeemer and mediator of God's elect.

What then is the deliverance in view of which Paul is thankfully assured? Is he saying that believers can attain a place of complete victory in the conflict with sin, such that there can be at least pockets of sinlessness by complete surrender? This answer runs against the flow thought about sin being always present when I want to do right. The deliverance has to be from the body as the instrument of sin that brings physical death and therefore from physical death itself in the resurrection of the body (Murray I, 269-270).

Resurrection as the time and place of deliverance shows that the warfare with sin is not just with us to the grave, it is with us every step to the grave! The battle continues, but we find strength for the conflict in the assurance of complete deliverance by God through Jesus Christ our Lord that will come in the resurrection for which we wait with groaning (Rom 8.23).

VII. Conclusion of the whole matter, 25b

So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. He summarizes the inner conflict (that is ongoing until the resurrection). I myself serve the law of God with the mind, which means I am active in a fruitful way from wholehearted commitment to obedience to God and thus to His law. However, I also serve sin with my flesh, which means I commit sin *as if under its rule* and with my flesh refers to my sinful nature in the fall.

How do we tap into this text given that it presents us with no imperative, duty or exhortation? Paul is not presenting a "victorious life" with pockets of sinlessness depending on how we fulfill our duties. The lesson for us is deeper. Sin is present in every act, as the Christian serves God by His law (all we do is tainted by sin). This grounds the daily confession of sin; this is humbling; this is the dynamic of growth in holiness by repentance. Repentance is the way of newness of life, of perfecting holiness in the fear of God without self-reliance. The Christian lives a life of repentance, a repentant life in which he hungers for righteousness by the law that is his delight to learn and obey. Thus, looking ahead in the midst of battle, he raises his head with assurance of complete deliverance in resurrection glory and finds strength to continue to fight.