

VICTORY OVER SIN – Romans 7:14-25 (Part-eleven of a sixteen-part study)

It is easy to overlook one important aspect of Romans 7:14-25, which in turn, can keep us from accurately interpreting Paul's intent throughout the passage. In v14, Paul is establishing a contrast between himself and the Law of God. The character of the Law is spiritual, while he is of the flesh, "sold into bondage to sin." Is he describing himself here as "carnal" in the same sense with which he rebukes the Corinthians for being carnal in I Corinthians 3:2-3? In light of what he says in the remainder of the chapter, that seems highly unlikely; expressing his intense desire to be obedient to God's Law, while frustrated with the fact that he falls short. If he is describing a period in his Christian life where he hasn't yet learned to apply and live out the truth of Romans 6, then why confuse us by switching to the present tense? It is his use of the present tense which must determine what he means when he refers to himself as "sold into bondage to sin." My conclusion is that there is no way Paul is describing himself in these verses as a defeated and carnal Christian.

Instead, when he says in v14 that he is "of flesh, sold into bondage to sin," he is describing his own *human mortality* which doesn't change upon one's conversion to Christ. In his great and profound statement of devotion to his Savior in Galatians 2:20, he claims to be living at the highest possible standard of spiritual existence: crucified with Christ, with Christ living in him and through him. Nevertheless, even that level of Christ-likeness must be expressed in his "flesh," and lived out by faith. It is this mortality, into which all of us have been born, that places limitations upon each of us, with the sin nature tainting and opposing everything we desire to be and do. This is true of the most committed Christian and never ceases to be the case throughout our earthly life. If that isn't true, and all of the limitations of our human mortality, as well as the ongoing existence of sin within, can be completely overcome by simply employing the principles of Romans 6, then by logical extension, we are forced to conclude that sinless perfection in this life is possible.

But if we are honest with ourselves, we know that it is not. Paul knew that it was not. So, after expressing his frustration over this harsh reality of his own mortality, He cries out to God in v24 – **"Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?"** What a way to describe his earthly existence. He was living his Christian life in a body that was doomed for death. But aren't we all? Does living victoriously in Romans 6 keep us from aging? Does living victoriously in Romans 6 prevent the aging process from culminating in our physical death? Of course not! Not even the most zealous, health/wealth, snake-handling Pentecostal fanatic can be in denial about that. And ironically, as Paul begins Romans 7 in the past tense and then transitions to the present tense, he also verbalizes the deliverance from his mortality which he so desperately longs for in the future tense. Who will save him from the body of this death? It will be Jesus Christ our Lord, at a time yet future, when we will experience the redemption of our body (Romans 8:23).

It would not be an overstatement to say that Paul was obsessed with that specific moment in time when, ". . . **this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality**" (1 Corinthians 15:53). He even prefaces that hope of our future resurrection with a similar sense of frustration in 15:19 – **"If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied."** Paul compares our mortal life to living in a tent and contrasts it with our eternal life, as that of living in a house (2 Corinthians 5:1). In Philippians 1:21-24, he desires to depart and be with Christ in heaven, because he knows that would be far better than remaining here on earth. This will be that ultimate victory over sin for all of us, when we are not only redeemed from the penalty of sin in our justification, as well as the power of sin through our sanctification, but also from the very presence of sin by means of our glorification (Romans 8:30).