

## **VICTORY OVER SIN – “Sold into Bondage to Sin” (Part-nine of a sixteen-part study)**

I debated over whether to make this segment a footnote at the end of our study, in order to add further confirmation to the conclusions which were made throughout. However, my decision is to use it as a grammatical/theological insertion right now, in order to set the stage for what comes next. This segment will be a bit technical, but hopefully helpful, in gaining a better understanding of the significance of Romans 7:14-25. Romans 7:14 is critical in acquiring such an awareness. When Paul contrasts himself with the Law of God, he affirms that he is “of flesh,” while the Law is spiritual. The word which he uses is the adjective “sarkinos,” derived from the root “sarx.” It is not being used here by Paul in referring to himself as a “carnal” Christian. Instead, he is describing himself as being “composed of flesh,” in contrast to the spiritual nature of God’s Law. Ironically, the same contrast between that which is spiritual and of the flesh, is used in 1 Corinthians 3:1. Only then, in vv2-3, does Paul proceed to describe the Corinthians as being carnal in that negative spiritual sense, by using a different derivative from the root “sarx.” These shades of meaning can be difficult to discern even for scholars. But the bottom-line point is simply this. In Romans 7:14, Paul is NOT referring to himself as a carnal Christian, but as a human being composed of physical flesh. A good contemporary translation would be: “The Law is spiritual, but I am physical.”

On the other hand, he makes it clear to his readership that his humanity has been adversely affected by a negative condition, namely, “sold into bondage to sin.” The word sold “piprasko,” was commonly used in Greek literature to refer to the selling of a slave; rendered here in the perfect tense with the passive voice. Why is this important? The perfect tense refers to a past event with present ramifications. The use of the passive voice indicates that Paul had no direct involvement with the past event, but is currently experiencing its negative impact upon his life. A good paraphrasing in the context of vv12-13 would be: “The Law is righteous, but I am sinful.”

Romans 7:14 also carries with it some heavy theological implications. The past event of being “sold into bondage to sin” must be a reference to the original sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, which has produced devastatingly negative consequences throughout human history. How? The original sin of Adam and Eve became a part of their nature, changing their genetic make-up. As a result, the “sin nature” of Adam and Eve continues to be passed on genetically to every one of their descendants. We are first conceived and then born into this world with that sin nature, which becomes the key factor in determining our behavior. It holds every one of us in bondage. Every human being, prior to our salvation in Christ, is a slave of sin. Apart from being set free by the redemptive work of Christ, no one is capable of breaking out of this enslavement.

Consider the significance of this statement in the culture of Paul’s day. If two slaves were to marry under the ownership of their master, and have a child, would that child be free? Of course not! It would also be a slave of the same master. On a more comprehensive scale, Adam and Eve’s singular act of disobedience has “sold” all of us into the bondage of sin (Roman 5:12). This is the imagery which Paul presents to us at the very outset of one of the most controversial passages in all of the New Testament. In addition, he creates a frame around this text by describing the human vessel in which he functions as “the body of this death” (v24), and longs to be rescued from it, by appealing to Jesus Christ our Lord (v25). In Romans 7:24-25, is Paul asking for victory over the power of sin? No! He is pleading for a future deliverance from the very presence of sin, which he describes in Romans 8:23 as “the redemption of our body.” It is this transition from the past tense in vv1-13 to the present tense in vv14-25, as well as the framing created by v14 in conjunction with vv24-25, which will be critical in helping us determine the meaning of this passage, next.