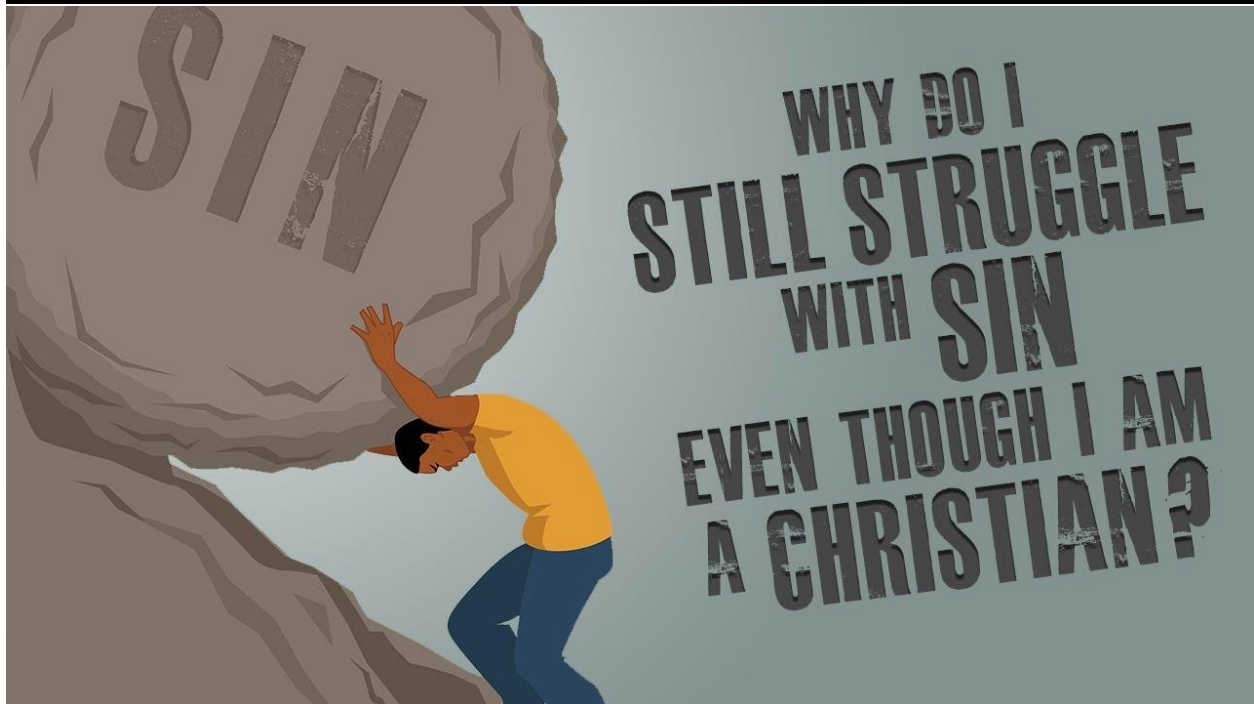


The New Creature Cocooned in the Old Body

by David Lee Burris



ROMANS 7:15

I DO NOT
UNDERSTAND WHAT I DO.

FOR WHAT I do
I WANT TO DO not do,

BUT WHAT I HATE I DO.

In his article entitled “Willing & Doing” David Fletcher explains:

What is it about himself that Paul finds so puzzling? The problem seems to be in the connection between his willing and intending to act and the actual performance of the act... He expands his self-diagnosis by admitting, ‘I can will what is right, but I cannot do it (Romans 7: 18). ‘For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do’ (Romans 7: 19). Paul finds that he wills as he should, but something falls short in the execution of his good deeds. He finds that he is doing the very opposite of what he intends or at least what he thinks he intends. The man who would exhort the Corinthian Christians, ‘Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ’ (1st Cor 11: 1) now finds himself in an embarrassing and distressing situation in which he would not seem to be a good model for anyone to imitate.

Psychologists might speculate about the processes going on in Paul’s life, and biblical scholars can speculate about the place of this remarkable interlude in Paul’s theological essay. Yet in a way, it is not puzzling that Paul is experiencing this distress. It seems to be part of the human experience and surely we all feel it in our own lives... Paul is not the first person to puzzle at the disjunction between the desire and will to do good and the evil that one actually performs.

Paul seems to be struggling with this sense of compulsion when he gives further analysis of his predicament. He finds that there seems to be a law, something of a Murphy’s Law of the Moral Life... that guarantees that things will go wrong. ‘So, I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand’ (Romans 7: 21). This law, Paul finds, is that for all his good intentions, evil is lurking to undo them.

This intimate look at a man racked with moral and spiritual anguish leaves us with questions. What is the internal force that seems to be derailing Paul’s attempts to live up to his own values? If Paul’s wretched, what hope’s there for the rest of us?

Paul raises an interesting question in the realm of moral motivation, as interesting to the ethicist as it is to the ordinary person trying to live a good life in accord with worthy ideals. Whether we are ethicists or ordinary people, we assume that we are capable of first willing to act, and then of following up that intention with action. We instinctively believe that ‘ought implies can,’ and that we have some control over our own motivation, without which we would not be free and true moral agents at all.

Examination of the Biblical Terminology: “Willing Vs. Doing”

The terms Paul uses to describe his thoughts and actions are the strongest argument for understanding his statements in this text to illustrate the confusion experienced by the sinner condemned through the law. Often, a close scrutiny of the words used will help us better comprehend the idea stated by the writer. For example, if one reads Galatians 6:1-5 not knowing two different Greek words are both rendered “burdens” in the English translation of verses 2 and 5, the reader is likely to be confused. However, when he understands that the word in verse 2 refers to a heavy load which must be shared while the word in verse 5 refers to a personal load, the meaning becomes obvious. Let us look at the terms in Romans 7:15-21 to see if we can get similar help.

Paul says, “That which I do I know not” (v. 15). Is he suggesting that he is not conscious of his actions? If so, his mental competence to stand accountable may be in question. Such is surely not the case with an apostle chosen by God to spread the truth and inspired to write these words by the Spirit. The word translated “know” is the Greek word *ginosko* which carries with it the significance, not just to being conscious of a fact, but of growing to understand the nature or comprehend the result of something. Whiteside commented on this word by noting:

It does not mean simply to be conscious of the particular act one is performing, but also to grasp the nature and consequences of what one is doing. No sinner does that. When Paul was persecuting Christians, he was conscious of his acts, but was utterly ignorant of the nature and consequences of his deeds. “Howbeit I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief” (1st Timothy 1:13).

He didn't know that every act he performed in persecuting the church was a crime against God and man; he thought he was doing right. He, therefore, did not know what he was doing what he was accomplishing. When Jesus was on the cross, he prayed: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." These men knew they were engaged in the act of crucifying a man called Jesus; they did not know that they were crucifying the Son of God. They did not know what they doing. "And now, brethren, I know that in ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers" (Acts 3:17). "For had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory" (1st Corinthians 2:8). Now, these men were not demented. They knew they were putting a person to death; yet they did not know what they were doing. If a sinner really knew the full nature and awful consequences of the life he is living, he would quickly turn away from it.

Three Words Describing Action

Three Greek words rendered to "do" or "practice" in our English translations of the context also bear examination. All three words are used in verse 15 providing us an opportunity to examine their use and relation. Notice the passage:

"For that which I do (katergadzomai) I know not: for not what I would, that do I practice (prasso); but what I hate, that I do (poieo)."

Why are three different Greek words translated with two English words, both of which may convey the same meaning? When we define the words, we are aided in understanding the text. Let us define them:

1. According to lexicographers Arndt and Gingrich, the Greek word *katēgadzomai* carries the idea of achieving or of accomplishing something. It does not describe a mere action, but connotes action towards an accomplishment. It could be illustrated by that which an artist ultimately “does” not just making strokes of paint, but accomplishing the desired end of his expression.

2. In contrast, the Greek word *prasso* describes one engaged in some action. It is mostly used of being involved in action which is not praiseworthy, thus rendered “commit” in many cases.

3. The last word, *poieo*, is used to signify the making, manufacturing or producing of something. It is used to describe the action of Aaron in producing the golden calf (Acts 7:40) and of God in creating the earth (Acts 17:24). It carries the connotation of action done to make an end product.

The sinner does not fully comprehend what he will achieve as a result of his participation in sin. Instead, the sinner merely lives for the moment, satisfying his lusts. But what happens when he has time to think about the direction of his life? At such times, he surely longs for a different life than is characterized by his action of committing sin. Yet, he keeps on doing the same thing. In the end, he hates the end product of his life being produced by his actions. In paraphrased form, that is Paul’s point in verse 15. The same points are made repeatedly as Paul elaborates on this theme using the same terms throughout the text to describe the captivation of the sinner who realizes his sinfulness through the old law, but has no deliverance without Christ.

Chapter Contextual Verse-By-Verse Exegesis Romans 7: 7-25

7:7 The significance of the term law as used in this context needs to be determined at the outset. Obviously, Paul is making a direct reference to the Law of Moses, he quotes from the Decalogue. This would only seem natural in view of the rest of the epistle. However, within this chapter, Paul is not so much concerned with law “in terms of its impermanent expression in the Mosaic system” as he is with the Mosaic system as a means of legal justification.

In verse five, the apostle wrote of “the sinful passions which were through the law.” So, the question arises in verse seven, “Is the law sin?” Does the fact that sinful passions are through the law mean that the law is sin? Paul answers, “May it not be!” How then is it said that sinful passions are through the law? Simply because, “I had not known sin except through the law.” Take coveting, for example, “I had not known coveting, except the law had said, ‘Thou shalt not covet’.”

7:8 Thus it was through the commandment that sin wrought all manner of coveting. Paul emphasizes this, saying that, “apart from the law sin is dead.” Commenting on this passage, R.L. Whiteside explained, “As sin is lawlessness, sin would not be operative where there is no law.”

7:9 Again emphasizing the necessity of the existence of law in order that sin might be manifested, and thereby demonstrating the true function of law, Paul states, “I was alive apart from the law once - but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.” When was Paul, or any man, ever apart from law prior to being subject to law? Whiteside answered this question, saying, “The only time Paul was without law was during the years of his childhood, before he reached the years of accountability.” He later commented, “It would be interesting to hear one of those advocates of hereditary total depravity tell us when Paul was alive without the law and when he died spiritually.”

What is meant by “the commandment came”? Again, following Whiteside:

The command came to Paul when he began to realize his own individual responsibility in the matter of obeying God. Then “sin revived.” Sin sprang to life. It does not mean that sin came to life again.

Whiteside's explanation of *he hamarda anezesen* is confirmed by lexicographer Walter Bauer's comment on the loss of the force of *ana*. He translated the phrase, "sin became alive."

7:10 So it is sin that brings death, but only inasmuch as there is law. "And the commandment which was unto life," if it were obeyed, was "found to be unto death" in that man violates law, is therefore guilty of sin, and consequently dies.

7:11 The ASV translates verse eleven, "for sin, finding occasion, through the commandment beguiled me, and through it slew me," whereas the KJV translates it, "For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me." Notice the difference in punctuation, and consequently, in what took place *dia tes entoles* (through, or by the commandment). Either construction is possible grammatically, but the latter is to be preferred contextually, for it is difficult to see how a person could be deceived through the command of God.

Several, taking the former construction, have argued that this is done in that the very fact that something is forbidden by law makes it even more tempting. This concept is often paralleled to the eating of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. J.P. Lange stated that sin "made the commandment a provocation."

It is true that the very fact that something is forbidden may make it even the more desirable to some. However, Paul is not describing only the rebellious individual, but all men under law and, as will be emphasized later, especially those who see God's law as good and desire to stand righteous. In regard to this latter kind of man, it cannot generally be said that the forbidden status of something makes it even more tempting.

Moses E. Lard interpreted the passage correctly. He wrote:

The precept was not the instrument of deception, but the circumstance that furnished sin the advantage. The presence of the precept was a fact. Of this fact sin took advantage to deceive... Now by dropping sin as personified, and substituting Satan for it; and by adverting again to the parallel of Adam, the meaning becomes clear. God said to Adam, "You shall not eat of it." Satan now had his advantage. Accordingly, he said to the woman, "you shall not die."

This deceived her. it was the precept, then, that afforded the advantage: but the lie did the deceiving. And so, in the case at hand. It was through the presence of the precept that the advantage was taken, but by some other means that the deception was affected.

7:12 So then Paul concludes that “the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and righteous, and good.” The question, “Is the law sin?” has been answered. Yes, the sinful passions were through the law, but the law is not sin. It is holy.

7:13 It has been demonstrated that the law is good, so now the question arises, “Did then that which is good become death unto me?” Not at all. “But sin (became death unto me) by working death to me through that which is good that through the commandment sin might become exceedingly sinful.” It was not the law that wrought in our members to bring forth fruit unto death, but sin; “the sinful passions . . . wrought in our members to bring forth fruit unto death” (7:5).

What then is meant by “that ... sin might become exceeding sinful”? Lard wrote, “by effecting my death by a just law, its (i.e., sin’s-JTS) true nature might become known.” We might add that, if the law had not been just, death could have been affected through it by something not wicked. But inasmuch as the violated law is, in fact, just, the violation is shown to be “exceeding sinful.”

7:14 In verse fourteen, Paul begins to explain more explicitly how sin works death through the law. “For we know that the law is spiritual. but I am carnal, sold under sin.” Whiteside commented:

Sin is here personified, and Paul represents himself as having been sold to sin as a slave he was . . . speaking of himself as a type of all who were under the bondage of sin.

Thus, the fact that man is carnal explains why he violates the spiritual law, and therefore, how death is produced. Since man is carnal, he is susceptible to fleshly desires and therefore he does not perfectly obey law.

Much of the controversy concerning whether or not Paul is speaking throughout the chapter of the experiences of one who is a child of God centers around this verse. D.M. Davies dealt with this controversy:

The language of verses 14-25 is too strong to permit of its being applied to the Christian experience. There is no doubt that the last clause of this sentence (in vs. 15, JTS) refers to the practice of slavery. The main message of chapter six is that in Christ a man is free from sin. How then could Paul, describing a situation of tension in his Christian experience, say that he was sold under sin? Where then is the freedom from sin which he insists on in the previous chapter?

So, Paul's point is not that even as a Christian, a man will constantly have inner turmoil between right and wrong, but rather that because man is carnal, he cannot stand just under a legal system.

7:15 At this point the evidence which demonstrates that "I am carnal, sold under sin" is introduced. Paul writes, "For that which I do I know not: for not what I would, that do I practice, but what I hate, that I do."

Although he granted that the meaning "is rare," Lard suggested "approve" rather than "know" as the proper translation of *ginosko* in this context, saying:

. . . to render the word know, in the present clause, is to make the Apostle, not only contradict himself, but speak like a simpleton. "For what I do, know not." If a man know not what he is doing, he is demented.

However, Whiteside responded:

Lard, with others, misses the significance of the word know. It does not mean simply to be conscious of the particular act one is performing, but also to grasp the nature and consequences of what one is doing. When Paul was persecuting Christians, he was conscious of his acts, but was utterly ignorant of the nature and consequences of his deeds.

Perhaps also it would help to distinguish more precisely between the words translated “do” and “practice” in order to clarify the verse. In this passage, *katergazomai* should be taken to mean achieve or accomplish, *prasso* to mean do or commit, and *poiein* can be translated cause, bring about, or accomplish. R.C. Trench restated the long recognized distinction between these last two words saying, “*poiein* brings out more the object and end of an act, *prassein* the means by which this object is attained.”

Thus, we might translate the verse: “For that which I accomplish I know not. For not what I would, that I do; but what I hate I bring about.” Now we can very easily see how one could know what he is doing, and yet perhaps not know what those actions would accomplish. We can even see how he might hate the very results that his actions bring about.

So, Paul, picturing himself as under law, demonstrates that he is carnal and sold under sin in that he does things which are wrong, even though he would not do these things if he were fully aware of and convinced of the consequences of his actions. **The pleasure of the moment which appeals to the fleshly side of man hides from view and ultimate consequences.**

7:16 Paul again emphasizes that the law itself is good: “If what I would not, that I do, I consent unto the Law that it is good.” H.P. Liddon commented, “This opposition of his real desires to his actual conduct implies his real concurrences with the moral excellence of the Law.”

7:17 In verse seventeen, Paul makes the logical inference from the preceding verse. “So now it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwelleth in me.” The “I” refers to the mind, i.e. the inward man (see v. 22). Paul uses “a figure of speech in which one member of a sentence is negative in order to emphasize the other member.” Compare John 12:44: “He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me.” The lusts of the flesh are so strong, they may cause a man to be deceived (e.g. “Ye shall not surely die”), to momentarily rationalize the irrationality of acting contrary to his mind’s desire to obey God. **Since the appeal of the pleasure of the moment is to the fleshly side of man, Paul lays the blame there, not to exonerate the mind (the mind is guilty of succumbing), but in order to explain how it is that a man who desires to be righteous can still sin.**

Paul is not denying personal responsibility. Rather, he is still proving that even if a man desires to do the will of God, under a legal system his fleshly desires lead to inescapable death.

7:18 Paul again specifies that facet within man which influences him to sin, saying, “For I know that in me, that is in my flesh dwelleth no good thing.” It is my fleshly side that leads me to sin. “For to will is present with me,” the “wish,” or “want,” to do good exists, “but to do that which is good is not” - this “wish,” or “want” - does not always triumph over the fleshly desires; and so to always do that which is good is not a reality.

Concerning the term “flesh,” Grubbs wrote:

The term is used here not (in, JTS) a physical but in an ethical sense, referring to the seat of the appetites – passions and lusts. “For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were through the law wrought in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.”

The impression should not be left that Paul is arguing that the fleshly desires always overcome the desire to do good, or even necessarily predominately. Grubbs noted that the good to which man under law cannot attain is not an occasional good deed, but “the Absolute Good, the morally perfect.” This is the good that is required by law, and this is the good which does not dwell in the flesh. Earlier it was stated that Paul is using himself to represent especially those who see God’s law as good and desire to obey it and stand righteous, but who only find death under law.

All that has been said in verses fifteen through eighteen emphasizes this desire to serve God, which is “with the mind” (7:25). This concept is totally at odds with the theory of Calvinism, and “commentators who are thoroughly wedded to that theory become confused in trying to explain verses 14-23. They cannot understand how a sinner could desire to do good, or delight in any good thing.”

7:19 Paul illustrates the statement made in the preceding verse by pointing out that, “the good which I would I do not: but the evil which I would that I practice.”

7:20 Then, having illustrated his point, Paul again affirms that it is the fleshly side of the would-be righteous man that leads him to sin: “It is no more I that do it, but sin which dwelleth in me.”

7:21 Most commentators take law in this verse to be the principle that, “to me who would do good, evil is present.” Along this line, Lard suggests the meaning to be, “When I wish to do good . . . I find it the rule with me that evil is present.” However, the argument has been made that “*ho nomos* (the law, JTS) in Paul always seems to have much more definitely the suggestion of something with legislative authority,” and therefore, Paul must still be referring to the Law of Moses in this verse.

7:22 Verse 22 makes clear how in the preceding verses, Paul could say “it is no more I that do it.” The “I” that is not the source of desire to sin is the inward man: “For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but . . .

7:23 . . . I see a different law in my members,” that is, in my fleshly members, or sinful passions. The different law is the law of sin (v. 25) which wars against what is good and desired by the mind. When the mind succumbs to fleshly desires, man sins and stands guilty under law. In such a state man has been brought into captivity; he is sold under sin, all because he is carnal.

7:24 Paul utters the helpless exclamation “of the man whom sin and law have brought to despair.” “Wretched man that I am,” because I am incapable of obeying law perfectly and therefore, sold under sin and brought into captivity under law. It must be emphasized that this is not the cry of the apostle Paul who is saved by grace. **This is the cry of a man who is apart from grace. “Who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?”**

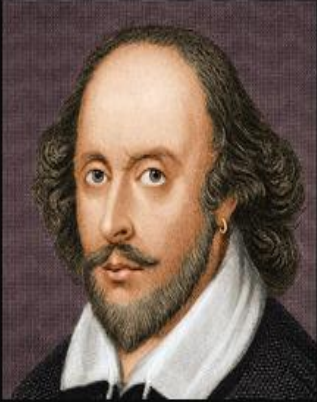
7:25 The deliverance comes. Man can find freedom from the law of sin through Christ. “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

After bringing the grace of God into the picture as the means of deliverance, Paul again turns his attention to man’s state apart from grace: “So then I of myself with the mind, indeed serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.” Not simply, *douleo* (I serve), nor even ego ... **doule but autos ego** ... *douleo*, translated “I of myself . . . serve” (ASV, RSV) or “I myself . . . serve” (KJV, NASB, NIV, NUB). The emphasis is on what a man can achieve himself, i.e., without Christ. Such a man may with the mind desire to serve God, but the flesh leads him to sin. Thus, he serves the law of sin, i.e. he is a bond servant, a slave of sin, incapable of escaping death. In this manner, in the last sentence of the chapter, Paul sums up what he has been saying in verses 14 - 23. – *DLB Edit of Two Truth Magazine Columns*

The point of this chapter is not to describe the constant war against temptation that must be waged even by the individual who is in Christ, other passages do that. The point of this chapter is to describe the hopelessness of man’s condition apart from Christ. Then chapter eight describes the salvation found in Christ...

OUR STRUGGLES OF THE HUMAN CONDITION ONLY END WITH DEATH

William Shakespeare



Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;
To sleep, perchance to dream—For in
that sleep of death what dreams may
come, When we have shuffled off this
mortal coil, Must give us pause, there's
the respect, That makes calamity of so
long life

AZ QUOTES

SPIRITUAL SHUFFLING COMPARES TO CATERPILLAR CHRYSALIS



WE ARE SPIRITUAL CREATURES HAVING A HUMAN EXPERIENCE

I'll Fly Away

A. E. D.

Copyright, 1932, by Hartford Music Co., in "Wonderful Message" Albert E. Brumley

1. Some glad morning when this life is o'er, I'll fly a-way;
2. When the shadows of this life have grown,
3. Just a few more wea-ry days and then, Fly a-way, fly a-way;

To a home on God's ce-les-tial shore, I'll fly a-way.
Like a bird from pris-on bars has flown,
To a land where joys shall nev-er end, Fly a-way, fly a-way.

CHORUS

I'll fly a-way, O glo-ry, I'll fly a-way
Fly a-way, fly a-way

way; When I die, hal-le-lu-jah, by and by,
in the morn-ing;

D.S.

