

Fact Sheet for **“I Do Not Do the Good I Want”**
Romans 7:7-25

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We have come to the passage in Romans that is absolutely critical to get right if we are to follow Paul's flow of thought throughout this book. It is the passage best known by the words of 7:15-25. There is a footnote in the Ryrie Study Bible on these verses that reads as follows... “The intensely personal character of these verses and the use of the present tense indicate that this was Paul's own experience as a believer.” This is the common understanding of the passage. But there is a huge problem. It doesn't fit Paul's flow of thought in this book at all!

Now all of us realize that we are tempted to sin, and that temptation can be intense at times. We all realize that we have all too often chosen the path of sin. I'm not taking anything away from that. But we can't interpret this passage by our personal experience or our feelings. We must interpret it by context.

⁷ What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." ⁸ But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead.

Paul is obviously addressing the Jewish believers at Rome. When Paul used the pronoun “I” he was not just referring to himself. He was using himself as an example that every one of them could identify with. The “sin” that seized opportunity through the commandments was the sin nature that we all share.

⁹ I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. ¹⁰ The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. ¹¹ For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.

Whenever I read these verses I think about what we call “the age of accountability”.

¹² So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

That word “So” introduces Paul's conclusion to the questions he posed in verse seven, “What then shall we say? That the Law is sin?” No, the Law is holy, and righteous, and good.

Paul continued using himself as an example and voiced another question.

¹³ Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.

¹⁴ For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.

Stop right here! That word “sold” is the same word used in Matthew 18:25. It means “to be sold as a slave”! But wait a minute! Has Paul just started talking out of the other side of his mouth? Is he now contradicting what he just wrote? In 7:14 he stated that we are sold as slaves under sin. But look what he wrote in 6:6, 11, 14, 17-18, 22; and 7:6! Was Paul now contradicting this? No! He wrote about something that every one of those Jewish believers knew. They could not achieve righteousness under the Law! The sin nature is way too strong!

Paul continued with the pronoun “I”, using himself as an example that every one of them could resonate with. He was not writing about their experience as believers, but about their experience before becoming believers!

15 For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. 16 Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. 17 So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

But you may say, "I feel that". But again, don't interpret this passage by your feelings, but interpret it by Paul's context. Place these verses into Paul's reasoning!

18 For 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. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

Again what they knew to be good was not strong enough to consistently overcome the sin nature. Think about this. Jesus didn't have a sin nature, but he still felt the strong pull of temptation (Matthew 4:1-2; Luke 22:44; Hebrews 4:15).

21 So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.

The word translated "So" here is different than the one in verse 12. Here it could be translated "consequently". But, it is still introduces a summary of what of what Paul has been saying since verse 13.

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.

The word translated "captive" means "prisoner". It goes right along with the word "sold" and "slave".

24 Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

But as Christians we have been set free from sin! This is why Paul could exclaim in the first part of his next verse...

25a Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Now again Paul gives us a summary.

25b So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

Understanding Romans 7:7-25 this way flows perfectly out of chapter 6... and perfectly into chapter 8.

ESV Romans 8:1-2 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

We as Christians are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Do you remember 7:23? Those who are not Christians need to be set free from the law of sin and death. This is why understanding Romans 7:15-25 to be referring to the Christian's struggle with sin cannot in any way fit into Paul's line of reasoning, his flow of thought. It also irreparably fractures what Paul will be saying in the rest of this letter.

Understanding Romans 7:7-25 the way I have presented it also leads to a very poignant application. When we, who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who can choose to live in the Holy Spirit's leading and power... when we choose to sin we deliberately choose to walk away from God and to sin when we don't have to. Own your sin! We cannot claim Romans 7:15-25 as our current reason for sinning. We sin because we deliberately choose to sin. This is also the reason Paul has been using and will use imperatives to describe how we should live as Christians.

God has freed us from slavery to sin and made us alive to righteousness!