

SUMMARIES OF MLJ'S SERMONS ON ROMANS 7:14-25 (WRITTEN FOR MLJTRUST)

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Introduction to Verses 14-25

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Romans 7:14 (KJV). ¹⁴For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.

Summary: There have been three main views historically regarding the identity of the man Paul describes in Romans 7:14-25, that he's: 1) an unregenerate man, 2) a regenerate man at his best, or 3) an immature regenerate man. I will wait until we've examined the details over the next few weeks before stating my view. The main point of this passage isn't Paul's experience, regardless of the verb tense used, but rather to show that the Law, though good, can't sanctify. The man of this passage says "I am carnal, sold under sin" (Rom. 7:14). Mere unregenerate men aren't aware they're carnal, and mature regenerate men like Paul aren't carnal, so the passage can't be describing a mere unregenerate man, nor a mature regenerate man.

Main Points: Romans 7:14-25 is one of the most famous and debated sections of scripture in the entire Bible. The main debate is about the identity of the man Paul is describing in this section. There have been three main views. Paul is describing 1) an unregenerate man; 2) a regenerate man always, at his best, and Paul himself at the time he wrote this; and 3) an immature Christian who hasn't yet received a second blessing experience. Most church fathers of the first three centuries regarded this section as a description of the unregenerate man. Augustine began that way, but then changed his mind and championed the view that it describes the regenerate man. The Protestant reformers, the Puritans, and almost all Reformed teachers afterwards have followed Augustine's exposition; while Arminians continued to maintain it the unregenerate man view. A later group of Reformed teachers came to believe it describes a regenerate man, but not at his best and as long as he lives. We should never allow a party spirit to blind us to truth. Rather than tell you immediately what view I hold and then attempt to prove it as we go through the section, I have chosen to examine the statements first and then work up to a conclusion inductively. You may have to be patient for a few weeks before you know my conclusion.

First, let's take a general analysis. In verse 14, "for we know the law" means Paul is continuing his previous teaching about the fundamental statement he made about the Law in verses 1-6. Verse 5, "when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death," resulted in two objections. He dealt with the first objection, "is the Law sin" (Rom. 7:7), in verses 7-12; and he deals with the second objection, was the Law "made death unto me" (Rom. 7:13), in verses 13-25. Paul's fundamental object here isn't to give his personal experience, but to show what the Law can't do, as he later says in Romans 8:3, "for what the law could not do." The Law can't save or sanctify. Also, the apostle's mere change to the present tense in verse 14 doesn't of itself decide the issue, or there would never have been any debate. It's common to use the 'dramatic present' to work out the inferences of a proposition.

Now to begin looking at the details. Verse 14a says the Law is spiritual because it comes from God, and isn't merely about external actions, but also internal motives, thoughts, etc. The key statement of this section is verse 14b, "I am carnal," meaning fleshly and under the Law, in contrast to spiritual. Paul doesn't say a part of the man speaking is carnal, but the man himself. This can't be speaking about the mature apostle Paul because it would contradict what he says in Romans 8:5-9, "you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit" (Rom. 8:9); and what he says in 1 Corinthians 3:1-4, "I, brethren, could not speak to you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ" (1 Cor. 3:1). Paul not only said the Corinthians were acting as if they were carnal, but also that there were others who were spiritual. So Romans 7:14 can't be about a merely unregenerate man, nor can it be about a mature regenerate man like Paul. We'll have to leave it at that for now.

Carnal Man: 1) Situation

<https://www.mljtrust.org/sermons-online/romans-7-14-15/carnal-man-1-situation/>

Romans 7:14-15 (KJV). ¹⁴ For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. ¹⁵ For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.

Summary: Paul gives every verse of Romans 7:14-25 primarily to show the Law can't sanctify us. The man described in this section can't be an unregenerate man, because he wouldn't realize he's a slave to sin. And he can't be a regenerate man, because that would contradict chapters 5, 6, and earlier verses in 7. Romans 5:21, "as sin hath reigned, ... even so ... grace reign[s]." Romans 6:14, "sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace." Romans 7:6, "now we are delivered from the law ... [so] that we should serve in newness of spirit." Verse 14 is the biggest obstacle to interpreting this passage as a description of the regenerate man, because the man says "I," not merely a part, "am carnal, sold under sin" (Rom. 7:14). In verse 15, Paul goes on to describe the life of the "I" of verse 14, not merely his sinful part, because his sinful part couldn't say, "I don't do what I want, and I do what I hate." This man's life, on balance, is one of frustration, defeat, and failure, as verse 24 says, "O wretched man that I am!" Verse 15 describes a man who has come to see the spiritual nature of the Law, but finds he can't keep it, and it says no more than that.

Main Points: I remind you that Romans 7:14-25 is a difficult passage. Don't be discouraged but let it motivate you to rely on the Holy Spirit and apply yourself more diligently. Now nothing is more important than to keep reminding ourselves what this passage is about. Paul gives every verse of this section to justify his view about the Law, especially that it can't justify or sanctify. His subsidiary theme is that the Law results in sin and death, not because there's anything wrong with the Law, but because there's something wrong with us. Commentators agree his general proposition that the Law is spiritual but the problem is that I am carnal, enslaved to sin, is the key phrase of the section and presents the major difficulty for those who interpret the passage as a description of the regenerate man. Paul says the man himself, not merely a part of the man, or his 'old nature,' is a slave of sin. He uses the terminology of chapter 6, "you were the slaves of sin, being then made free from sin you became the slaves of righteousness" (Rom. 6:17). On the other hand, no unregenerate person has ever said he's carnal and a slave to sin because he doesn't understand the spiritual nature of the Law. Paul felt "alive without the Law" before the Law "came" (Rom. 7:9) to him. He thought he was doing well. So this verse by itself puts right out the possibility that this could be a description of the unregenerate man.

So then is it a description of the regenerate man? It can't be, because that would contradict what Paul said in chapter 5, "as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord" (5:20). We're no longer in Adam, but in Christ; no longer under the Law and sin, but under the "much more" (Rom. 5:9, 10, 15, 17, 20) of abundant grace (Rom. 5:20). We died (6:2), aorist tense, so Paul says don't let sin reign even in your mortal body (Rom. 6:12). "Sin shall not have dominion over you." 6:14. "Ye were the servants of sin" (6:17), but no longer; "being made free from sin and become servants to God" (6:22). "Now we are delivered from the law, ... [so] that we should serve in newness of spirit," Rom. 7:6. And in chapter 8, "the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." But this man in 7:14 is the slave of sin. People read chapter 7 like they've never read chapter 6. To say 7:14 describes a regenerate man is a denial of everything the apostle set out to establish in chapters 5 and 6, and even earlier in chapter 7. Those who say 7:14 is a description of the regenerate man have to say it's not the whole truth, that chapter 8 is also true of the regenerate man, but I say these two things can't be true at the same time. Either a man is sold under sin or the slave of grace and Christ.

In verse 15 Paul goes on to describe the life of the man himself, not merely of a part of him that says, "I am carnal" (vs. 14), because the sinful part couldn't say, "What I want to do I don't do, and what I hate I do." He's talking about the whole person. Those who take the view 7:15 refers to a regenerate man have to water it down to say Paul is very sensitive and regrets he's not entirely spiritual. Now Paul's not saying this man always does wrong invariably, but neither may we say he does wrong only occasionally or only in his thoughts. Rather, this is a description of his life on balance, as a whole. It's a life of frustration, defeat, and failure, as verse 24 says, "O wretched man that I am!" This is clearly not the unregenerate man because he never knows this kind of conflict and such hatred of sin. Now be careful about what I'm about to say. This experience is true in a measure, and only in a measure, of every regenerate person. The regenerate man still has sin in his

mortal body which is why he has the fight of 6:11-13. But 7:15 is certainly not a description of the regenerate man as he is in general or of one who follows Paul's exhortation to "let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body" (Rom. 6:12). Therefore I end with this. Verse 15 describes a man who has come to see the spiritual nature of the Law but who finds he cannot keep it, and it says no more than that.

Carnal Man: 2) Dual Personality

<https://www.mljtrust.org/sermons-online/romans-7-16-20/carnal-man-2-dual-personality/>

Romans 7:16-20 (KJV). ¹⁶ If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. ¹⁷ Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. ¹⁸ For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. ¹⁹ For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. ²⁰ Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.

Summary: In this section Paul shows why the Law can't sanctify, even a man that's been enlightened to understand the spiritual nature of the Law, because of the powerful nature of sin that dwells in the flesh, as evidenced by this man's inability to do the good he wants and to avoid the evil he hates. The two "I's" in verse 15 aren't the same. "If then 'I' do," is the whole man who is speaking and acting; "that which 'I' would not," is the part of him that has come to recognize the spiritual character of the Law. And the two "me's" in verse 18 aren't the same. "I know that in me," the man's flesh, the part where sin dwells, "dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me," the part of the man that delights in the Law. The man is saying the will to perform is present with me, but the ability to perform isn't present with me, because of this other me, which demonstrates the complete inability of even the holy Law of God to deliver us.

Main Points: In these verses, Paul is still describing the man he told us is "carnal, sold under sin" in verse 14. Therefore, this man doesn't do what he wants, and he does what he doesn't want (vs. 15). Since he regrets what he does, he agrees with the Law, which means he agrees the Law is good (vs. 16). Paul's purpose here is to say something about the Law, not about his experience. The Law isn't the cause of this man's sin, even though it aggravates it, because the Law is good. And this man, as a whole, isn't the main cause of his sin, because he doesn't want to live that way. So what's the cause of his sinful way of life? "Sin that dwelleth in me," (Rom. 7:17). That's a daring and difficult statement.

The two "I's" in verse 15 aren't the same. "If then 'I' do," is the whole man who is speaking and acting; "that which 'I' would not," is the part of him that has come to recognize the spiritual character of the Law. This duality is first explicitly introduced here, though it may have been hinted at in verse 15, and this duality is never found in an unregenerate person. The unregenerate are unhappy that their consciences condemn them, and they themselves don't condemn themselves. Sin is not something outside us, but something that dwells at home within us; something that's a part of us, and more powerful than conscience or willpower. That's why it's utterly ridiculous to suggest that moral teaching, education, or better conditions can solve the moral problem. What's needed is power.

Verses 18-20 are merely an extended explanation of Paul's staggering statement about the problem of sin in verse 17. The bracketed "that is, in my flesh" shows the extreme difficulty of expressing this truth, and the apostle's awareness of the possibility of confusion, because of the complications sin brought into the world. The two "me's" in verse 18 (KJV) are not the same. "For 'I' know," is the man's whole personality, "that in 'me,'" the man's flesh, "dwelleth no good thing; for to will," to keep the Law and please God, "is present with 'me,'" (KJV) the part that consents to and delights in the Law and hates wrong, whereas "no good thing" dwells in the first 'me.' "But how to perform that which is good 'I' find not," refers to the man's whole personality that is able to talk about the two "me's" that are in him. The will to perform is present with me, but the ability to perform isn't present with me, because of this other me. If you don't know the experience he's talking about then you're unregenerate, but it doesn't follow therefore that he's describing the regenerate.

Let me give three conclusions. 1) Paul isn't disclaiming responsibility or making excuses for the man or his actions. That's antinomianism or dualism, hence the first epistle of John. 2) Paul is showing the terrible power of sin, like he did in verse 13. 3) In all this biblical psychology and personal analysis, we say again, Paul's real concern isn't to show his experience, but rather the complete inability of even the holy Law of God to deliver us. The Law was given so men could see the

exceeding sinfulness of sin, so that like a schoolmaster (Gal. 3:24) the Law could bring us to “Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead” (Rom. 7:4).

Carnal Man: 3) The Battle Within

<https://www.mljtrust.org/sermons-online/romans-7-21-23/carnal-man-3-the-battle-within/>

Romans 7:21-23 (KJV). ²¹I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. ²²For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: ²³But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

Summary: Paul continues to demonstrate what the Law can't do, despite the greatness of the law. The man described in these verses says he's come to see the true meaning of the Law (vs. 9), and delight in the Law in his inward man (vs. 22), his mind (vs. 23), but sees another law in his members that takes he himself, not merely his 'sinful part,' captive as a slave (vs. 23). Therefore, he goes on to say, "O wretched man that I am" (Rom. 7:24), in despair over persistent defeat. He's not a mature regenerate man waiting for deliverance via the death, resurrection, and glorification of the body, because a man who knows God and has the indwelling Spirit wouldn't cry out, "Who?" "Who will deliver me?" Rom. 7:24. The Spirit is not mentioned until the next chapter, but the interpretations that this man is regenerate have to import all that here. He's a man who's come to see the spiritual nature of the Law, and we'll leave it at that for this time.

Main Points: Paul takes up one statement after another about the place of the Law, pausing to prove each one as he goes, especially to demonstrate what the Law can't do despite the greatness of the Law. Verses 18-20 emphasized why this man does the evil he doesn't want to do, and verses 21-23 emphasize why this man doesn't do the good he wants to do. In verse 21, this man concludes he's discovered a law from his experience, an invariant principle he distinguishes from "the law of God" (Rom. 7:22), that the moment he wants to do good evil jumps forward in opposition. This man says "his delight is in the law of the LORD" (Ps. 1:1) in his "inward man" (Rom. 7:22). The traditional Reformed view must rely heavily on the interpretation that "the inward man" means "the new man," "the regenerate man." But the apostle tells us in the next verse that "the inward man" simply means the invisible part of him, the man's spirit, "the mind" (Rom. 7:23), in contrast to the outward man, "my members" (Rom. 7:23), my bodily organs (cf. 2 Cor. 4:16). This can't refer to an unregenerate man, but only to a man whose mind is illuminated by the Holy Spirit, but we have no right to press this term "inward man" any distance whatsoever beyond the human spirit.

This man says he's come to see the true meaning of the Law (vs. 9) in his mind but sees another kind of law in his members that invariably wars against the Law he delights in with his mind, which would be a horrible enough existence; but even worse, it always wins and takes he himself, not merely his 'sinful part' captive as a slave. Expositors who say it brings only his sinful part into captivity are guilty of dualism which implies it's ok to sin since only the body is sinning. Paul is not referring to "the presence, power, and tendency to sin" while having victory "on the whole," as one commentator says. In contrast, this man says that, not always, but on the whole, he sins; whereas 2 Cor. 10:3-5, says generally we don't sin, but rather our prevailing condition is that we bring every thought into captivity to Christ.

The next verse is the proof of this exposition. If only the sinful part of this man was occasionally brought into captivity in this war, why would he go on to say, "O wretched man that I am" (Rom. 7:24), I, the man myself? It's his despair over the persistence of defeat, not merely over the existence of conflict, that makes him cry out so. Amazingly, expositors go on to attribute deliverance solely to the distant future via the death, resurrection, and glorification of the body, when everything contrary to God's will shall be removed. But would a man who knows God and has the indwelling Spirit cry out using the indefinite term "Who?" "Who will deliver me?" Rom. 7:24. If he knows about Christ, why doesn't he call on him? If he knows the Spirit, why doesn't he say, "I can't, but the Spirit can?" The Spirit is not mentioned here, but the interpretations that this man is regenerate have to import all that here because of the controlling theory the interpreters began with. The next time we'll gather up all the evidence we've been accumulating and see the composite picture of this man. We've already seen it's clearly not the unregenerate man, and it is clearly a man who has come to see the spiritual nature of the Law, and we'll leave it at that for this time.

The Wretched Man Identity (1)

<https://www.mljtrust.org/sermons-online/romans-7-25/the-wretched-man-identity-1/>

Romans 7:25 (KJV). ²⁵I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

Summary: As Paul prepared to summarize this section in which he described this man who is brought “into captivity to the law of sin in my members; ... who shall deliver me?” (vs. 23-24), he broke out into thanks that he, Paul, knows who it is that delivers. Then he summarized the section regarding the man he was writing about as, “So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin” (vs. 25). This can’t refer to an unregenerate man, because Paul as an unregenerate man thought he was fine before the commandment “came” (vs. 9) to him. And this can’t refer to a fully regenerate man at his best and of Paul himself because of verses like Romans 6:18, “being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.” There are some passages about regenerate men, like Galatians 5:17 and 1 Corinthians 9:27, which at first glance seem to be describing the same conflict as the man in Romans 7, but they show general victory rather than general defeat. And there’s another set of passages about regenerate men, like Romans 8:23-26 and 2 Corinthians 5, which at first glance seem to be describing the same groaning, but they’re different because they mention the Spirit, and the struggle is with suffering without rather than with sin within.

Main Points: The first half of verse 25, “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 7:25a), is an ejaculation of Paul’s strong emotion of gratitude after thinking back over what he had written in this section, because Paul knows who can deliver. It’s not an essential part of the argument, because he goes on to say something it would be impossible to give thanks for, about serving the law of sin with the flesh (Rom. 7:25b). The apostle always cared more about what he was saying, and freedom to follow the Spirit, than in trying to produce literature as art for art’s sake. The second half of verse 25 begins with “so then” (Rom. 7:25b), because here Paul sums up the whole description of the man he wrote about in this section. “I myself,” in the light of verse 23, probably refers to this man’s identification of himself with his mind. “Serve” refers to being a slave to the Law with his mind and to sin with his flesh. In light of 6:18, “being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness,” a fully regenerate man can’t make the statement of Romans 7:25. This man is aware of a duality within himself. He’s come to see the spiritual character of the Law, but he can’t keep the Law because the power of sin that dwells in him is stronger than he is. Thus he cries out for deliverance. This can’t refer to the unregenerate man, because Paul as an unregenerate man in verses 7-13 thought he was fine before the commandment ‘came’ to him. But can this then be the description of a fully regenerate man at his best in this world, and of Paul himself at the time he wrote this?

Whenever you have a difficult passage of scripture look at similar scriptures. Those that argue Paul is describing a regenerate man claim there are other passages that say exactly the same thing, while those who argue Paul is describing an unregenerate man say this passage has no parallel in other scriptures. One set of passages at first glance seem to be describing the same conflict, like Galatians 5:17, “the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.” But the context there shows the regenerate aren’t slaves to the flesh, and the Holy Spirit guarantees the certainty of victory, because we’re not under the law per Galatians 5:18 and Romans 6:14. Galatians 5 not only says the exact opposite of Romans 7, but was designed to do so, because Paul’s purpose in Romans 7 is to show what the Law can’t do, whereas his purpose in Galatians 5 is to show what the Spirit can do. 1 Corinthians 9:27 also appears similar to Romans 7 at first glance, but shows that Paul keeps his body under subjection, whereas the man in Romans 7 is brought into captivity by sin in his members, by a principle consistent enough to be described as “another law” (Rom. 7:23). The regenerate man always has a battle, but in general he wins; not loses, as the man in Romans 7. Ephesians 6:12 is often mentioned as a parallel passage because it says we wrestle, but there “we wrestle not against flesh and blood.” The man in Romans 7 would have given anything to be “able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph. 6:11) as all the regenerate can do.

Another set of passages like Romans 8:23-26 and 2 Corinthians 5 seem similar to Romans 7 because they speak about the mourning and groaning of the fully regenerate man. But they are different because they mention the Spirit, and the

struggle is with suffering in the world without, rather than with sin within. Isaiah 53:3, Mark 9:19, John 11:33, and Gethsemane show that groaning isn't always over sin within, because Jesus didn't have sin in his members. So these are not parallel passages, and they have no relevance at all in determining the identity of the man described in Romans 7. The next time we'll show that if Romans 7 is interpreted to be describing the fully regenerate man, it would be incompatible with teaching elsewhere, and we'll consider the interpretation that it refers to an immature Christian who hasn't yet received a second blessing.

The Wretched Man Identity (2)

<https://www.mljtrust.org/sermons-online/romans-7-13-25/the-wretched-man-identity-2/>

Romans 7:13-25 (KJV). ¹³ Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful. ¹⁴ For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. ¹⁵ For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. ¹⁶ If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. ¹⁷ Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. ¹⁸ For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. ¹⁹ For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. ²⁰ Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. ²¹ I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. ²² For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: ²³ But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. ²⁴ O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? ²⁵ I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

Summary: If this passage is interpreted as representing Paul at his best it would contradict many other scriptures in Romans, in Paul's other epistles, and in other New Testament writings. It would be putting the New Testament saints even below the Old Testament saints as described by David in the Psalms. The gospel prophesied in Isaiah promised "the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness" (Is. 61:3). To say that the more a Christian matures, the more aware he becomes of sin within, would mean the highest point he reaches will be his greatest depth of misery. A Christian should never speak like that. The key to Romans 7 is that the Holy Spirit isn't present. Paul's describing a man experiencing an intense conviction of sin but who doesn't know anything except the Law, which is the topic of Romans 7. And there's no indication it's about an immature Christian. Even the most immature Christian would never cry, "Who shall deliver me?" "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed!" Jn. 8:36.

Main Points: We're now ready to sum up this famous portion of scripture and reach our conclusion, and try to decide if it refers to the unregenerate man, or to the mature regenerate man including Paul himself, or to an immature Christian. If this passage is interpreted as representing Paul at his best, I can show you, though we found no parallel passages, that interpretation would be incompatible with other portions of scripture about the regenerate man. First, in this epistle, I can't imagine a man who could write, "this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice" (Rom. 5:2), could also say of himself, "O wretched man that I am!" (Rom. 7:24). It also seems incompatible with the whole purpose of 5:12-21 which tells us about the "much more," "superabounding" power of grace.

Then in chapter 6, practically everything Paul says is incompatible with this interpretation. "How shall we who died to sin live any longer therein" (Rom. 6:2). It's impossible; but here's a man who seems to be living in it. His general experience is that he's brought into captivity to the law of sin in his members. But the whole object of salvation is, "our old man is crucified with him, [so] that the body of sin might be disannulled, [so] that henceforth we should not serve sin" (Rom. 6:6). "He that is dead is freed from sin," Rom. 6:7. The exhortations of 6:11 about 'reckoning,' and to "let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof" (Rom. 6:12), would be rendered meaningless by interpreting Romans 7 to be about the regenerate man. "Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin" (Rom. 6:13). There's no need for you to do so; but here's a man in chapter 7 that does this because he can't help it. He's constantly brought into captivity by this power greater than himself. And then the great

proclamation of verse 14, "sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace." And verses 17-18, "ye were the servants of sin, but ... being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness." Again in verse 22, "being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness." I can't see these statements are at all compatible with, "I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members" (Rom. 7:23). This man can't do what he wants and he does what he doesn't want. Then in this very chapter, Paul said the reason we're fruitful is because we're dead to the Law and married to Christ (Rom. 7:4), and therefore "now we are delivered from the law, ... [so] that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter" (Rom. 7:6). These great assertions make it quite impossible to interpret these later verses to refer to a regenerate man at his best.

And in chapter 8, verses 2-4, "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, [so] that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us." That's what he's been telling us about in Romans 7, what the Law can't accomplish; but then in chapter 8 he tells us what God did accomplish by sending his Son for sin. In chapter 8 he describes the regenerate man. "If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body," Rom. 8:13. You can do it, so do it. But the whole trouble with the man in chapter seven is that he can't do it. "Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear," Rom. 8:15. We are "joint heirs with Christ" (vs. 17). And having said that, am I to go on and say, "O wretched man that I am" (Rom. 7:24)? These things aren't breathing the same atmosphere. Likewise in Romans 12:1-2 about presenting "your bodies" (Rom. 12:1), and Romans 14:17, "the kingdom of God is ... righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." Can a man with that joy at the same time cry, "O wretched man, ... who shall deliver me" (Rom. 7:24), because I'm constantly brought into captivity by the sin in my members?

Also, in 1 Corinthians 9:27, "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection." My body's not keeping me under. In 2 Corinthians 3:6-7, "the letter killeth," and the Law is "the ministration of death," which is exactly what the man in chapter 7 discovered. "The commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death," Rom. 7:10. In contrast, "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. 3:17); not my being brought into captivity by the law of sin in my members. "We all ... are changed ... from glory to glory" (2 Cor. 3:18), always progressing, and when we reach the highest rung of the ladder of sainthood, do we cry out "O wretched man that I am?" Not a bit of it! Galatians 2:20, about Christ living through me, shows how the regenerate man speaks. And in Galatians 4:3-6, "we ... were in bondage, but ... God sent forth his Son ... to redeem them that were under the law, [so] that we might receive the adoption of sons, and because ye are sons," you cry out, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me" (Rom. 7:25)? No, no! We cry, "Abba, Father" (Gal. 4:6). In Galatians 5:16-24, "Ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. ... Ye are not under the law. ... They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." Also, can a man who knows "the exceeding greatness of his power" (Eph. 1:19) cry out "Who shall deliver me?" (Rom. 7:24). Eph. 3:19-20, "That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us." Does the man who says that go on to say, oh yes, but it's equally true of me, "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death" (Rom. 7:24)? Philippians 4:4, "Rejoice in the Lord always." Can you do that if you're conscious of constantly being brought into captivity? 1 Thessalonians 4:3, "This is the will of God, even your sanctification." 1 Thessalonians 5:23, "I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless." How does Paul normally speak of himself at the beginning of his letters? "Paul, the bondsman of Jesus Christ." Is it possible that he should cry out at the same time, "O wretched man, ... who shall deliver me?" (Also, Phil. 1:21; 3:13-17; 1 Thess. 2:10; 2 Tim. 4:6-8; 1 Jn. 1:4; 3:9, 21; 5:4-5, 18-20; 2 Pet. 1:3-11; Mt. 11:28; Lu. 14:18-21; Jn. 7:37-39; 8:12, 34-36; 10:9-10.)

To interpret Romans 7 as the fully regenerate man is to put him even lower than the Old Testament saints like David in Psalm 51. David knew he had committed a terrible sin, adultery and murder, but he didn't cry out in despair, "Who shall deliver me?" He knows who. He prayed, "Create in me a clean heart." Also, Ps. 119:49-65, 97-104, 121, 165-168 about a man delighting in the Law of God and claiming he's kept it. The gospel prophesied in Isaiah 35 and 61 promised "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness" (Is. 61:3), not "O wretched man that I am" (Rom. 7:24). To interpret the man in Romans 7 as the regenerate man excludes sanctification and means the more a man advances in the Christian life, the more aware he is of sin within him, and the more miserable he becomes.

The highest point he reaches will be his greatest depth of misery. It would mean the gospel increases misery, and New Testament men are more miserable than Old Testament men. A Christian should never speak like this. Quite ridiculous! Impossible! The real secret to understanding Romans 7 is to notice the Holy Spirit isn't present, and therefore it's not describing the regenerate man. There's also no indication it's describing an immature Christian. That's based on the fallacy of saying a man can be justified without being sanctified. Even the youngest Christian would never cry out, "Who shall deliver me?"

The apostle isn't describing his experience. As we've said all along, his purpose was to say the Law can't justify or sanctify. He says, "now the position you're putting me in is this." He's describing a man experiencing an intense conviction of sin but who doesn't know anything except the Law. Many have this experience before they come to justification. The one great hope for men is salvation; to be dead to the Law through the body of Christ and be raised to serve in newness of spirit per Romans 7:1-6, which Paul then goes on to continue talking about in chapter 8, after handling these two objections about the Law as a parenthesis in verses 7-25, and showing what the Law can't do. Thank God, the regenerate man isn't the one described in Romans 7:14-25, but rather the man I've been describing in all those other passages. "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed!" Jn. 8:36.

Science; Morality and God

<https://www.mljtrust.org/sermons-online/romans-7-22-25/science-morality-and-god/>

Romans 7:22-25 (KJV). ²²For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: ²³But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. ²⁴O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? ²⁵I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

Summary: This past week man has been able to go up above the earth's atmosphere and make an orbit around the earth. One newspaper article claimed that since man has been able to escape the force of gravity, he can also find a way to escape the compulsions of his own nature. This false optimism is based on a failure to understand the absolute central message of the Bible that the real problem of man is sin, a power infinitely greater than gravity. "I see another law in my members" (Rom. 7:22-23), dragging me down into captivity. I want to go up, but there's a terrible force pulling me down. I can't resist it! The achievement of the past week holds out no hope whatsoever for man's moral problems, or peace, or joy. Nothing from man's side can lift us up out of the power of sin, which is why "God sent forth his Son" (Gal. 4:4), "that the righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in us" (Rom. 8:4). "The gospel ... is the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16). There's no need for any new discoveries for salvation. It's already done. "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" Rom. 7:24-25.

Main Points: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature," 2 Cor. 5:17. He looks at everything differently than he used to, and differently from most other people. You can tell if a man is a Christian because it will affect his response to everything. This past week man has been able to go up above the earth's atmosphere and make an orbit around the earth. One newspaper article claimed that since man has been able to conquer and escape the force of gravity, he can also certainly move forward in solving his moral problems and escape the compulsions of his own nature. This false optimism is based on a failure to understand the absolute central message of the Bible that the real problem of man is sin. Advances in rocket technology can even be used to deliver more destructive weapons. This accomplishment is just another step in the progression of physical science, not a sudden change in man's level of intelligence or morality. The history of civilization is the history of man making great technological discoveries, and of each great civilization collapsing from moral problems. While progress in physical science has gone up, the moral condition of individuals and the world around us has gone down. So the fact that man has accomplished this staggering thing this past week opens up no new possibility whatsoever morally. Man can't deliver himself from 'the worst moral compulsions of his own being,' to use the words of the newspaper article. Democracy, education, and social movements all fail to solve the problem.

Why is it that man can succeed in the physical realm but can only fail in the moral realm? Romans 7 gives the answer. First, the problem of gravity is a problem outside man, but the moral problem is within man. Secondly, the power of sin is an infinitely greater power than that of gravity, the atom, etc. The devil's power is second only to God. "I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me," Ps. 51:5. Rebellion is in the smallest infant as a result of the fall. "The good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do," Rom. 7:19. I want to live a good life and do the right thing. No man ever set out to be a drunkard. "I delight in the Law of God after the inward man, but I see another law in my members" (Rom. 7:22-23) dragging me down into captivity. I want to go up, but there's a terrible force stronger than gravity, in the moral sense, pulling me down. I try many ways, but I can't resist it!

Man solved the gravity problem because his mind is free to do so intellectually. But his mind isn't free morally because "the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7). Men's hearts are vile, their deeds are evil (Jn. 3:19), their wills aren't free but in bondage to sin. The Law can't deliver us. "The motions of sin ... were by the Law." Rom. 7:5. "The Law is spiritual, but I am carnal," Rom. 7:14. Send up your rockets intellectually, it's never enough to overcome the law of sin in our members. The achievement of the past week holds out no hope whatsoever for man's moral problems, or peace, or joy.

There is only one way of deliverance, one power greater than the power of sin and the devil. "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord," Rom. 7:25. Nothing from man's side can lift us up out of the power of sin which is why "God sent forth his Son" (Gal. 4:4), "that the righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in us" (Rom. 8:4). "The gospel ... is the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16), conquering sin and death. The event this past week was a great scientific achievement, but it has no relevance whatsoever to your greatest need and mine. There's no need for any new discoveries for salvation. It's already done. "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord," Rom. 7:24-25.