

# Romans 7

Paul's struggle with sin before he became a Christian.

By John & Ellen Duncan

Can one be living like Paul in Romans 7 and not be in violation to what he taught us to do in Romans 6 and 8?

Compare for yourself below: Romans 7 vs. Romans 6 and 8.

<p><i>Romans 7:9-25</i> <i>Paul is:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>carnal</i></li> <li>2. <i>a slave to sin</i></li> <li>3. <i>constantly struggling with his flesh's sinful appetites</i></li> <li>4. <i>in bondage to doing wrong</i></li> </ol>	<p><i>Romans 6 &amp; 8 (context of Ch. 7)</i> <i>Paul is:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>spiritual as opposed to carnal</i></li> <li>2. <i>free from sin as opposed to a slave to sin</i></li> <li>3. <i>dead to the flesh and its sinful appetites</i></li> <li>4. <i>in freedom to doing right</i></li> </ol>
<p><b>Rom 7:14</b> For we know that the law is spiritual: <b>but I am CARNAL, SOLD UNDER SIN. [Was Paul an Enemy of God?]</b></p>	<p><b>Rom 8:6-7</b> For to be <b>carnally minded</b> is <i>death</i>; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the CARNAL MIND IS ENMITY [ENEMY] AGAINST GOD.</p>
<p><b>Rom 7:15,17</b> For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. Now then it is no more I that do it, but <u>sin that dwelleth in me.</u></p>	<p><b>Rom 6:1-2</b> What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. <u>How shall we [Paul includes himself here], that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?</u></p>
<p><b>Rom 7:18-19</b> ..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. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.</p>	<p><b>Rom 8:8-9</b> So then they that are in the flesh <u>cannot</u> please God. But YE ARE NOT IN THE FLESH, but in the Spirit...</p> <p><b>Rom 8:13</b> For if ye live after the flesh, YE SHALL DIE: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.</p>
<p><b>Rom 7:23</b> But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into <u>captivity</u> to the law of sin which is in my members.</p>	<p><b>Rom 6:15-16</b> What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, <u>his servants ye are to whom ye obey</u>; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?</p>

Paul penned Romans 7 to describe his experience prior to becoming a true Christian.

## **Biblical Scholars**

Adam Clarke's NT Commentary says regarding Romans 7:14, "by 'I' here he [Paul] cannot mean himself, nor any Christian believer."

John Wesley's Notes on the NT says "St. Paul, having compared together the past and present state of believers... interweaves the whole process of a man reasoning, groaning, striving, and escaping from the legal to the evangelical state. This he does from Romans 7:7, to the end of this chapter."

W. B. Godbey's Commentary on the NT says, "We have here carnal 'I' and spiritual 'I' used contrastively ever and anon. We must not identify them, for the one represents the old and the other the new man, different as sin is from holiness, and Satan from God."

These are just a few among many Bible scholars and students who have decided to "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2 Tim 2:15)

## **The Context**

In literature class you learn that context is to be of primary consideration when reading any text to obtain its correct interpretation. The context is the passages which precede and follow the text being studied. If you examine Romans 6, 7, and 8 together (the front page of this tract may help), both Rom. 6 and Rom. 8 clearly contradict what Paul writes in Romans 7.

When Romans 7 is taken out of its context, one will have a wrong understanding of what the Apostle Paul is saying in this chapter. We must take these chapters together and apply the Laws of Interpretation learned in High School.

Both Rom. 6 and Rom. 8 were written about one who is victorious over sin; however, Rom. 7 describes an inconstant, weak, and unstable hypocrite, unable to deny self and follow Christ.

## **"But Paul is Speaking in the Present Tense!"**

One of our main objections is Rom. 7's present tense. However, there is a common verb tense called the Historical Present Tense. This is part of one's ordinary speech and is present in other Biblical passages.

In the textbook *Essentials Of English Grammar* by L. Sue Baugh, you will find that "writers occasionally use the present tense when reviewing the contents of a book or describing past events to bring them vividly to life for the reader. This form of the present tense is known as the literary or historical present." (2nd Ed., p. 15)

In general, the Historical Present Tense in a passage (1) starts in the past tense to establish its form; (2) the writer then uses the present tense to bring a vivid description of an event. For example: "I was an atheist when I was 20 [past tense]. A neighbor came to me one day to tell me about Jesus... But I don't want to hear it! [present tense] I am an atheist. I don't believe in God!"

Paul, in Romans 7, follows the same format. Romans 7:9-11 uses the past tense first:

**Rom 7:9-11** For I was alive without the law once [past tense]: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me... Paul then commences writing in the present tense to give his readers a vivid picture of the torment in the life of a hypocrite.

**Rom 7:14** For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. [present tense to the end of the chapter]

Paul writes Romans 7 in the Historical Present Tense to give hypocrites a chance to closely identify with his struggle with sin prior to conversion.

If you, my friend, can identify with this passage, you might be asking some questions as the Apostle Paul then concludes the chapter with the question, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom 7:24)

1. "How can I ever get victory over my sinful desires?" The Apostle Paul then answers, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Rom 7:25)

Yes! This is the answer to victory over sin. Jesus Christ! The NT promises victory, not slavery. Jesus said, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:32)

2. "What must I do?" Do as the Apostle Paul, "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Rom 6:11)
3. "You mean, victory over sin all the time? How can anyone do that?" Through Jesus Christ, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." (Phil

4:13)

4. "But Jesus died because I can't keep the commandments!" Jesus came to forgive you from your PAST sins (Rom 3:25). Once you become a Christian you CAN obey His commandments. However, many REFUSE. God would be a tyrant if He gave us commandments that we had no ability to keep. "If ye love me, keep my commandments." (John 14:15)
5. "If I can keep the commandments and be obedient, then I'll be God, because only God is perfect." We are not perfect as God because all have sinned [past tense, Rom 3:23]. Jesus is the only sinless One from birth to death and all eternity. However, we are commanded to be obedient once we are born again. "And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Heb 5:9). We are to be Christ-like [Christian] and God-like [godly]. We are told to "go and sin no more" (John 5:14). Jesus even says, "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46)

Listen to Paul:

**Rom 8:1** There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

**Gal 5:16** This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.

Notice there is no condemnation for those who are walking after the Spirit. Paul tells us in Galatians that if you are walking in the Spirit, you are not fulfilling the lust of the flesh. But if someone is walking in the flesh, they ARE condemned already (John 3:18).

Be honest: are you free from sin or a slave to sin? Jesus saves FROM sin (Matt 1:21). FROM, not IN. (Acts 3:26).

Are you free of sin? Are you walking in the Spirit and not fulfilling the lust of the flesh? Have you honestly been set free from all your sin? Flee from sin to Jesus Christ and live the true Christian experience, free from all sin!