

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this Bible study series two teachers will do Bible study from ROMANS 7:14-25.

In Romans 7:14-25, Paul teaches that there is a spiritual and moral war going on in the Christian. The Christian has, as it were, two natures: a sinful nature and a regenerate nature. The sinful nature is not his real nature, but it is nevertheless a power that often makes him a prisoner. Time and again, the believer commits certain sins, but he longs to be freed from these sins. The moral law cannot deliver him from the power and the depravity of sin! From his own experience Paul shows *the insufficiency of the law for holiness!* In the inward conflict between sin and holiness, no law can help the Christian. The only hope of victory in the struggle between his sinful nature and his regenerate nature is in the *grace* of the Lord Jesus Christ.

(S) **STEP 1. READ**

Let us read Romans 7:14-25 together. When you are two or more people, take turns to read one verse each until you have completed the reading. Due to shortage of time, please read Romans 7:14-25 for yourself.

(T) **STEP 2. DISCOVER**

Let us discover and discuss some important truths in Romans 7:14-25. "Which truth in this passage is important for you?" or "Which truth in this passage touches your mind or heart?" Think and write your answer in your notebook. After a few minutes take turns to share your discoveries with one another.

(S) An important truth for me is from Romans 7:14-20. What the law cannot do. Although the law is holy, righteous and good, it cannot make Christians holy, righteous or good.

First. Christians have two aspects in their human nature. The one aspect is called *flesh* (7:18), that is, *their sinful nature*, which is imperfect, weak and transitory. The other aspect is called *mind*, (7:22,25), that is, *their regenerate nature*, which is controlled by the Holy Spirit from within and by God's moral law from without. Romans 7:14-25 describes the conflict between a Christian's sinful nature, which he derived from Adam, and his regenerate nature, which he derived from Christ (cf. 5:17-19). Both his sinful and regenerate nature dwell in his soul (spirit) and body.

Second. In Romans 7:14-15, Paul argues that the law is unable to sanctify Christians. This is not due to the nature of the moral law, but due to the sinful nature, which still dwells in Christians. The law is *spiritual* in nature, because it reveals God's nature and will, which is holy, righteous and good (7:12). But the sinful nature of Christians is *unspiritual*, that is, it does not and cannot subject itself to God and God's holy, righteous and good will. While non-Christians *voluntarily yield* themselves again and again to be slaves of their sinful nature (6:16), Christians are *involuntarily sold* to their sinful nature (7:14). Christians do not willingly give themselves to the service of sin, but their sinful nature is in the position of a sold person, whose acts are not always the evidence of their inner inclination (7:14). Christians often want to do the good things, but their sinful nature works so forcefully against them that they do evil things instead (7:15).

Third. Paul's spiritual and moral goal is nothing less than perfection (cf. Phil 3:12-14; cf. Mt 5:48; Heb 12:14). But at the end of each day when Paul evaluates his life, he realises that he falls far short of God's standard of perfection and loathes some of the evil things he has done. He realises that his goal is much higher he actually can attain.

Fourth. In Romans 7:16-20, Paul concludes several important things. He concludes that although Christians hate their transgressions of God's moral law, they still admit that God's moral law is good (7:16). He concludes that the sinful acts, which Christians do, are no longer the criterion of their real character (7:17). Their sinful acts are indeed their own acts. But when these sinful acts are not performed with the full agreement of their regenerated nature, they no longer show the complete human nature of Christians or the real state of Christians. He concludes that the sinful acts, which Christians often do, only confirm that nothing spiritually or morally good or beneficial lives in their sinful nature (7:18-20). Although the moral law commands what a Christian should do and the regenerate nature of Christians desires to do what the moral law commands, the moral law simply cannot destroy the sinful nature in Christians! Whenever God commands that a particular evil should not be done, God's moral command does not automatically destroy the inclination in Christians to do that evil thing.

Conclusion. The moral law or Ten Commandments cannot help Christians in the struggle between their sinful nature and their regenerate nature. The moral law simply cannot make a Christian holy, righteous or good.

(T) An important truth for me is from Romans 7:21-25. What the law cannot do. Although Christians delight in God's moral law, only God's grace can rescue them from the absolute dominion of their sinful nature.

First. The struggle of Christians is between their sinful nature, which they derived from Adam, and their regenerate nature, which they derived from Christ. In Romans 7:21-25, Paul states his final conclusion. With their regenerate nature (mind), Christians continually delight in God's moral law (7:22). But Christians soon discover and painfully realise that their sinful or depraved nature again and again wages war against their regenerate nature and make them feel like prisoners. The sinful nature not only makes war against the Christian, but sometimes also conquers the Christian (7:23)! It takes the soul and body of Christians captive and makes them subject to its powerful corrupt influence. The power of the sinful nature is still so great, that Christians cannot resist it with their own will power or effort (cf. 7:15,23). Christians do not become the willing servant of their sinful nature, but rather its miserable victim. As long as Christians still live in their present physical bodies, they remain the *unwilling and reluctant servants* of their own sinful natures. As long as Christians live in their present physical bodies, their sinful nature will be present and the control of the Holy Spirit will never be perfect or total in them.

The present physical body of Christians is called "the body of death" (7:24), because their physical body is still the sphere where their sinful nature operates most specifically, causing spiritual and finally physical death.

Second. The moral law by itself only makes Christians more aware of their helpless and depraved condition. It drives them to seek victory in their struggle against their sinful nature from where it only can be obtained, that is, from Christ (7:25). Only Jesus Christ can and will certainly rush to the rescue to save Christians from their "body of death" (7:24). Once for all he has crucified their old unregenerate nature (6:6). Once for all he has set them free from sin and they have become slaves of righteousness (6:18) and of God (6:22). But again and again he will come to rescue Christians from the forceful operation of their sinful nature. And at his second coming, he will *certainly, completely and forever rescue* them from their sinful nature (7:24).

Conclusion. The struggle of Christians is between *their sinful nature*, which they derived from Adam, and *their regenerate nature*, which they derived from Christ. The sinful nature of the Christian is a power from which he cannot free himself. Time and again he serves his sinful nature as a slave. However, the regenerate nature of the Christian is also a power, because nothing less than the Holy Spirit lives in him! Therefore, again and again he also serves God's moral law as a slave. Paul does not simply accept this present dual condition. He is deeply convinced that Jesus Christ will rescue him out of this condition. Therefore, he has the responsibility to make war against his sinful nature and put to death its misdeeds through the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. 8:13; Galatians 5:16-26).

(S) STEP 3. QUESTION

Let us try to understand all the truths in Romans 7:14-25 and ask our questions about the things we still do not understand. "Which question about anything in this passage would you like to ask to the group?" Think and write your question in your notebook. Then discuss the questions and try to find answers.

1st Question. (7:14-26) What phase of Paul's personal experience is portrayed in this passage? Is this the experience of a regenerate person or of an unregenerate person?

(T) There are people who argue that Romans 7:14-26 cannot be the experience of a born-again believer. They base their argument on the statement, "I am unspiritual" (7:14) and on the contrast between Romans chapter 7 on the one hand and Romans chapters 6 and 8 on the other hand. Nevertheless, Paul describes the experience of a born-again believer in Romans 7:14-26.

One. Paul is humble and realistic about himself.

As a born-again believer Paul describes himself as "the worst of sinners" (1 Tim 1:15) and as "a wretched man" (7:24) as long as he is not yet completely saved from his depraved nature. This would only happen when he sees Jesus Christ face to face (cf. 1 Jn 3:1-3).

Two. Romans 7:14-26 is more likely a description of a believer than an unbeliever. It is unlikely that an unregenerate person would say, "I agree that God's law is good" (7:16,22), "I do not approve of sin, I hate sin and deeply regret my sins" (7:15,19,24) and "I wish to do what is good" (7:18,19,21). It is unlikely that an unregenerate person would thank God, through Jesus Christ, as Paul is doing (7:25). It is clear that in Romans 7:14-25, Paul describes how great the weakness of Christians is. In order to be sanctified, they need a much greater power outside themselves than their sinful nature inside themselves. They need no one less than Jesus Christ and his Holy Spirit!

Three. There is a great difference between Romans 7:14-26 and Romans 7:5,9a. When Paul was unregenerate, he lived *in the flesh* or sinful nature and *bore fruit for death* (7:5). When he lived apart from law, he gave no serious attention to God's law, the law did not arouse sinful desires in his sinful nature and he lived an undisturbed self-sufficient and self-

righteous life, unafraid of God's punishment for sins (7:9a)! Romans 7:5,9a describes an unregenerate person. But Romans 7:7-13 most likely describes Paul's experience just before, during and shortly after his conversion. The change of the past tense in these verses to the present tense throughout Romans 7:14-25 must refer to a radical change from an unregenerate to a regenerate person! In Romans 7:14-26 Paul describes the weakness and struggle of believers as long as they still live in their present mortal bodies on this earth!

Four. There is no contradiction between Romans 7:14-26 and Romans 6:18,22. The born-again believer is *simultaneously a sinner and a saint*. On the one hand a born-again believer is still "sold under sin" (7:14), that is, his sinful nature still has such an influence in his life that he cannot yet live a complete sinless life (cf. 1 Jn 1:8-10; 2:1-2). The sinful or depraved nature is still a power that wants to coerce and control the believer (7:21,23,25). Time and again the sinful nature attacks and opposes the Holy Spirit living in the believer and tries to drag the believer back into his old life-style (7:23a). Often the sinful nature makes the believer a prisoner of itself (7:23b). The sinful nature is so powerful that the believer cannot resist it with his own will power or effort. Paul does not say that the sinful nature always conquers, but that the sinful or depraved nature of man is a power from which man cannot free himself and which often conquers man in spite of the fact that man does not intend it to conquer.

On the other hand the born-again believer has once for all died to sin (6:2), has forever been justified from sin (6:7), has once for all been set free from sin (6:18,22) and has once for all become a slave to righteousness (6:18) and a slave to God (6:22). He is commanded to continually reckon himself dead to sin and alive to God (6:11). He is commanded never to allow sin to be his master or lord (6:12). He is commanded never to present the members of his body as weapons of unrighteousness to sin (6:13), but commanded to present the members of his body once for all as weapons of righteousness to God (6:13) and as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness (6:19). The dominating position and power of his sinful nature has been broken. Although time and again he does fall into doing sins (Romans 7:14-26), he cannot, does not want to and will not continue to live in sin (Rom 6)! Satan, the godless and wicked world and his sinful nature cannot stop the believer from doing righteous works and from growing in holiness (6:13,17,19)!

2nd Question. (7:14). What is the difference between being "in the flesh" and being "unspiritual"?

(S) **One.** All non-Christians are "in the flesh". The non-Christian has only one nature: the sinful or depraved nature, which dominates and controls him. He does not have the Holy Spirit living in him (8:7-10). Although he voluntarily chooses to be a slave of his sinful nature (6:16), he cannot voluntarily choose to be free from his sinful nature. He irresistibly offers the members of his body as instruments to serve unrighteousness and unholiness. He *does not* submit to God and God's will. He *cannot* even submit to God and God's will. He *cannot* please God at all. Thus, to only be "in the flesh" is to be unregenerate.

Two. All Christians are "unspiritual" as to one aspect of their human nature only. The Christian has, as it were, two natures: his sinful nature and his regenerate nature. The sinful nature of the Christian is called *unspiritual, carnal* and is especially evident in Christians that have not grown (cf. 1 Cor3:1,3). The regenerate nature of the Christian is also called his "mind" (7:23) and refers to him as a person who has the mind or way of thinking of Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Cor 2:16). The Holy Spirit lives in him and wages war against his sinful nature (cf. Gal 5:17). The regenerate nature of the Christian is his righteous and holy status in Jesus Christ (cf. 5:18; 6:4-8; 1 Cor 1:30). It is the reality of the Holy Spirit living in him (cf. Ps 51:10-11).

The sinful nature of the Christian often causes him to do things, which he hates, and to neglect doing things, which he loves. The Christian knows that in his sinful nature there is nothing that is good or beneficial (7:18). Thus, to be "unspiritual, carnal" does not mean to be unregenerate.

In the period between regeneration and final glorification, every Christian experiences a constant war between his sinful nature and his regenerate nature. In this life, a Christian is a walking civil war (cf. Gal 5:16-18)! The fact that Christians experience this conflict between their sinful and regenerate natures is a proof that they are born-again.

3rd Question. (7:14). What is the difference between "being a slave to sin" and "being sold to sin"?

(T) **One.** Being a slave to sin during the unregenerate state. Romans 6:6,16,17 and 19 teach that before their regeneration, all people *used to be slaves to sin and served sin as a slave*. They behaved as people who had *voluntarily* sold themselves as slaves to sin that dwells in their sinful nature. This is proved by the fact that in their unregenerate state they obeyed the wishes of their sinful nature and they offered the members of their body to serve impurity and ever increasing wickedness. Because they are unregenerate, they *do not and cannot free themselves* from the dominating power of their sinful nature. They do not submit themselves and cannot submit themselves to God and his will. They cannot please God (8:7-8). Thus, "being a slave to sin" means still being unregenerate!

Two. Being sold to sin during the regenerate state. When people become regenerate believers, they have once for all been set free from the above condition of slavery to sin and have once for all become slaves of God (6:18,22)! The

condition of slavery to sin in Romans 6:6,16,17,19 does not return! The Greek in Romans 7:14 says that Paul has “been sold to sin” and not has “been sold *as a slave* to sin”. The condition of slavery to sin cannot be said of regenerate believers.

Galatians 5:17 teaches that there is a constant conflict between the sinful nature and the Holy Spirit, so that a Christian does not do what he really wants to do. Likewise, Romans 7:14 teaches that the believer is “sold to sin” (7:14) or “a prisoner of the sinful nature that works within the members of his body” (7:23). The believer is thus the passive subject to a power that is alien to his will and from which he cannot free himself. He acknowledges that his sinful nature is still a present reality and still exercises a powerful influence over him. He is *involuntarily* subjected to the forceful operation of his sinful nature. This is proved by the fact that he time and again does things, which he does not want to do (7:15), and often cannot do what is good (7:18). Thus, as in Galatians 5:17, the believer experiences a powerful spiritual and moral conflict raging in the members of his present body, in which the dictates of the sinful nature opposes the dictates of the Holy Spirit, which lives in him (7:23).

However, like Galatians 5:22-25, Romans 8:12-14 teaches that through the Holy Spirit living in him, the believer does not have to live according to the sinful nature and can put the fruit of the sinful nature to death. Through the power of the Holy Spirit living in him, the believer *can again and again* resist his sinful nature and do what he really desires to do, which is, what God wants him to do. But because he also has a sinful nature, he *often* cannot resist the evil influence of his sinful nature and cannot do what he really wants to do. Although the believer is spiritually and morally regenerate and is under the dominion of the Holy Spirit, he is still spiritually and morally influenced by his sinful nature. As long as the believer lives in his present physical body, his sinful nature will also be present and the control of the Holy Spirit will not yet be perfect or total in him.

(S) **ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

First. Join a house fellowship that does Bible study. Use “the five steps” Bible study method to prepare Romans 8:1-17.

Second. See the workbooks “Go and preach God’s Kingdom” and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to “Discipleship training on the air”.