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EXEGETICAL PAPER ON ROMANS 7:7-25

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Main Idea and Outline

A. Main Idea: Romans 7:7-25 is a clarification given by Paul in order to guard against possible misunderstandings regarding the nature and function of the Torah in the life of the believer.

1. [verse 7] “Since Paul has already shown that the Torah, unattended by the Spirit, kills and condemns, and that the Torah, apart from the work of the Spirit, actually makes people sin more, one might come to the false conclusion that Paul thinks the Torah is somehow evil or in some ways identified with sin itself. In the present verse (7) Paul repudiates the idea that the Torah should itself somehow be connected with sin.”¹
2. [verses 8-11] Paul further deals with the fact that the Torah (apart from the Spirit’s direct work in writing it on the heart through faith) can be “exploited” by sin and by the realm of the sinful nature. Thus, the Torah could be perceived to be less than good and holy in cases where sin and man’s sinful nature exploit the Torah.²
3. [verses 12-23] Paul goes on to deal with whether the Torah, which is good, can be blamed for man’s death; however, he concludes that it is not the Torah, but sin making use of a good thing that is the ultimate cause of man’s death.³
4. [verses 24-25] Paul concludes his thoughts by describing the reality of the extreme struggle that will be characteristic in any person who is righteous by

¹ Tim Hegg, *Pauls’ Epistle to the Romans Vol I, Chapters 1-8: Notes & Commentary*, (Washington: TorahResource, 2005), 173.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

faith. He describes through personal experience the “real anguish of severe and relentless warfare (not despair!),”⁴ and the earnest longing for final deliverance believers go through in this life, combined with also having a thankful confidence in God and a sincere commitment to God’s Torah while recognizing the fact (honestly) of continuing sinfulness that will remain with the believer until he puts on immortality at the resurrection.

Introduction

“That the *‘flesh’* was crucified with Christ and can yet be a menace to the believer is one aspect of a paradox that recurs repeatedly in Paul’s writings.”⁵ Believers are exhorted to ‘put off the old man’ and ‘put on the new man’ in places like Ephesians 4:22, 24 and Colossians 3:9f. In Romans, Paul is urging the community at Rome in a similar manner by exhorting them to “put on Christ” (Romans 13:14), “and thus be in practice what they already are by the call of God.”⁶ In Romans Chapter 7, Paul confronts the root or core problem behind the paradox, and that is sin. While the Torah was given by God to reveal sin, and therefore, due to man’s fallen condition and pride, knowledge of the Torah would ultimately produce even more occasion for man to be found guilty before God; the Torah itself was not what causes man’s death. Nor is the Torah to be thought of as sin or sinful; however, the Torah alone has no power to save or redeem man from their sins; it can only reveal the sin that is already present in the heart and mind of the man.

Without the inner working of the Spirit of God, the un-regenerated heart takes a view of the Torah that wrests it from its God-given purpose. Sin, then, is seen to be more than bad behavior or unkind actions.

⁴ Tim Hegg, *Pauls’ Epistle to the Romans Vol I, Chapters 1-8: Notes & Commentary* (Washington: TorahResource, 2005), 173.

⁵ F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), 205.

⁶ Ibid.

Sin, because of the commandment, is seen to be outward rebellion against Almighty—it is seen for what it truly is—idolatry, an attempt to replace the Almighty with one’s own ideas and desires.⁷

Knowing this to be the case, Paul concludes Chapter 7 of Romans by explaining the reality of the struggle that each believer will have to face between his old nature (which desires to rebel against God’s Torah) “because the mind set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so,”⁸ and their new nature (which does desire to and can obey God’s Torah). Such a paradox will continue during a believer’s earthly existence; however, Paul ultimately encourages believers (as he continues in Chapter 8) to make no provision for their flesh noting that they are no longer under obligation to obey their sin nature now that they are in Christ.⁹ Rather, believers should continue to put to death the deeds of their flesh,¹⁰ while holding fast to the hope within them knowing that eventually the struggle will end, and they will be set free from their body of death,¹¹ and receive the promise they have in Christ Jesus.

Context

“When we meet Paul in the book of Acts, he is a Pharisee and a student of Gamaliel, the man who defended the Apostles before the Sanhedrin. He is a Greek-speaking Jew from Tarsus. His Hebrew name is Shaul (Saul); and his Greek name is Paul.”¹² The original disciples had heard rumors, but were unwilling to believe the report that Paul was somehow teaching against

⁷ Tim Hegg, *Pauls’ Epistle to the Romans Vol I, Chapters 1-8: Notes & Commentary* (Washington: TorahResource, 2005), 182.

⁸ Romans 8:7

⁹ Romans 8:12

¹⁰ Romans 8:13f

¹¹ Romans 7:24

¹² D. Thomas Lancaster, *Restoration: Returning the Torah of God to the Disciples of Jesus* (Colorado: First Fruits of Zion, 2005), 148.

the Torah. “Paul’s opponents and adversaries were misconstruing his inclusion of and leniency toward new Gentile believers as an anti-Torah posture. James and the Jerusalem elders had already endorsed that leniency, and understood the rumors to be false.”¹³ Therefore, “it is ironic that most Christian theologians have accepted these false allegations as gospel truth.¹⁴ In Paul’s day, believers were part of the larger Jewish community. The seventh-day Sabbath was still the regular day of worship,”¹⁵ and believers were still meeting in the synagogue communities as is noted in Acts 15:21. So while there is overwhelming Biblical evidence to support the fact that Paul,

...did not consider a zealous adherence to the written Torah as in any way incongruous to a sincere and forthright faith in Yeshua. We must consider, however, that in Paul’s day, the Oral Torah of the Sages had gained such prestige as to be, in some cases, not only equal in authority to the written, divine Torah, but also eclipsing it in terms of everyday *halachah* (from the Hebrew *halach* ‘to walk,’ thus describing the manner in which one lives out one’s beliefs). Yeshua Himself bemoaned this phenomenon (Mk 7:8-9).¹⁶

Therefore, it is not surprising how Paul’s teachings could be both controversial in his day as well as confusing for some, particularly modern day readers. Even Peter confessed that some of the writings of Paul were difficult for the unlearned to understand, and that some people were and would continue to distort Paul’s message.¹⁷ Furthermore,

In the intertestamental period it was assumed that the law would remain the standard for righteousness and judgment in the final age. Hence those intertestamental passages which speak of the righteous or judgment presuppose continuing validity of the law.

From these scattered references Davies concludes that although the intertestamental writers believed in the continuing validity of the law, they anticipated that “there would be at least a better understanding [of it] in

¹³ D. Thomas Lancaster, *Restoration: Returning the Torah of God to the Disciples of Jesus* (Colorado: First Fruits of Zion, 2005), 149.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 153.

¹⁶ Tim Hegg, *Paul’s Epistle to the Romans Volume I, Chapters 1-8: Notes and Commentary* (Washington: TorahResource, 2005), vii.

¹⁷ 2 Peter 3:16.

the future than the present. More specifically, they expected that (1) the law would be interpreted more satisfactorily and gloriously, and that (2) Gentiles would be included under its sway.¹⁸

Clearly, the New Testament affirms these intertestamental ideas, because Jesus did come and interpret the law more satisfactorily and gloriously in addition to setting in motion the “time of the gentiles” or nations, (according to Luke 21:24). This was the fulfillment of that aspect of the promise to Abraham that included salvation for the gentiles, grafting them into the Israel of God.¹⁹

Another important consideration relating to the context surrounding Paul’s teaching in Romans is the statement he makes in Romans 5:14 that “nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses...”

Why did he say that death reigned from Adam until Moses? Surely he meant from Adam to Yeshua...or did he? What was it that happened in Moses’ lifetime that had the power to stop the reign of death? The giving of the Torah. Walking in Torah **by faith**...Chapter 7 [of Romans] opens with another curious statement: *Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law) that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives?* Notice that he identifies his readers (commonly thought to be Gentiles) as those who are more than just familiar with the law, but who *know* it.²⁰

Lea and Black report that although there were a substantial number of Jews who lived in Rome, “it seems more likely that the congregation consisted of a Gentile majority with a strong Jewish minority.”²¹ While this is likely the case, Paul confirms for us that his audience is well versed in the Torah, so they will understand the message he seeks to deliver to them in the context of the Hebraic conception of the Torah and the *halachah* of that time.

In the chapter leading up to the selection covered in this analysis, Paul has expounded on a common theme in the form of a metaphor that he often uses in which he contrasts the “Spirit”

¹⁸ J. Julius Scott Jr., *Jewish Background of the New Testament* (Michigan: Baker Books, 1995), 328-329.

¹⁹ Galatians 6:16 and Romans 11:17ff.

²⁰ Warren L. Bowles, *Christianity Reconsidered*, 2nd ed. (Kelowna, Canada: 2004), 168.

²¹ Thomas D. Lea and David Alan Black, *The New Testament: Its Background and Message*, 2nd ed. (Tennessee: B & H Publishers, 2003), 392.

with the “letter,” as in chapter 2:29 and 7:6 of Romans and twice in 2 Corinthians (3:3,6). In the immediate text that precedes our selection, “letter/Spirit” (7:6) is paralleled to the earlier “flesh/Spirit” (7:5).²² The same type of parallels seen in Gal 3 and the context of Paul’s rebuke is clearly set within the contrasts of Spirit and flesh. The context itself indicates a contrasting justification by faith against those who are teaching the necessity of “works of the Torah” (i.e., the teaching that Gentiles can gain covenant status through becoming proselytes) as a means of salvation.²³ In addition, in Romans 8 Paul puts Spirit and flesh as opposites, “concluding that those who are in the flesh cannot submit themselves to the Torah of God, yet those who walk according to the Spirit and not the flesh actually fulfill the requirements of the Torah in their lives.”²⁴ We know that this is how Paul intends for us to understand his words because of his later conclusions in Romans 8:1-4 (following our selection) in which he states two principles. First, that we have been released from the condemnation of the Torah, and second, the Torah is now able to be fulfilled in us because we no longer walk (i.e. live) according to the *flesh* but in accordance with the Spirit.

F. F. Bruce explains:

The ‘flesh’ is subject to the law of sin and death and so is under the sentence of death; ‘if you live according to the flesh, you will die’ (Rom 8:13); ‘for he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption’ (Gal 6:8). Sin, of any kind, is a “work of the flesh,” and results in death... The flesh, in the distinctive Pauline sense, is doomed to die, but the body is destined for immortality.²⁵

“Thus, far from saying the Torah is done away with in the life of the believer, Paul teaches clearly that what has been done away with is the condemning power of the Torah, and as

²² Tim Hegg, *Paul’s Epistle to the Romans Volume I, Chapters 1-8: Notes and Commentary* (Washington: TorahResource, 2005), 167.

²³ *Ibid.*, 167-168.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 167.

²⁵ F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), 206.

a result, we are free to establish the Torah by living it out through the power of the Spirit.”²⁶

Furthermore,

The Abrahamic covenant still stands as the model of righteousness by faith, and the Mosaic covenant which came 430 years later could not overturn or annul the previous promise (Gal 3:17)...the success of the covenant depended, not upon two parties, but upon One (meaning there was no mediator of the Abrahamic covenant in contrast to the Mosaic which required a mediator, vv. 19-20)...the promise of the blessing was to Abraham, a promise based entirely upon the faithfulness of God and not the obedience of Abraham. Apparently there were those who were convincing the Galatians that only Jews had a place in the world to come (this rabbinic teaching was based upon Is 60:21, cf. m.*Sanhedrin* 10:1), leaving Gentiles only one option: to become proselytes via the rabbinic ritual. Such a teaching was entirely contrary to Paul’s message of justification by faith alone apart from the works of the Torah...Paul therefore declares that the condemning function of the Torah is abolished for all who are in Yeshua, and shows that the Torah, declaring us guilty, drove us to the Messiah as our only hope. (Paul gives his personal experience of this in Rom 7:9-12). Now that we have believed in the Messiah, this condemning aspect of the Torah no longer has jurisdiction over us. But it does not follow from this that the whole of the Torah has been abolished, for Paul immediately writes, “Is the Torah then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be!” (v.21)²⁷

Romans 7:1-6 confirm these same ideas, for it clearly demonstrates through the example of marriage that the laws pertaining to marriage remain intact as long as both partners are alive; however, when one spouse dies, the other is free from the legal requirements of that marriage.

“The obvious point is this: **we died** in Messiah, the Torah did not die.”²⁸ Therefore, if we believe Paul meant that “living in observance to Torah” is equivalent to being “under Torah” (ref. Rom 6:14) we error in two ways.

First, we must seriously consider the context. Paul is not contrasting observance of the Torah with non-observance, but rather, being a slave to sin in contrast to being a slave of righteousness. “Obedience to the Torah of God” (1 Cor 7:19) and being a “slave to sin” are opposite in Paul’s theology. Secondly, to understand “under Torah” in Rom 6:14 as meaning “living in observance of the Torah” forces us to admit that in observing the Torah there is no grace. How can this possibly fit with the righteous men and women of old, such as those innumerable in Heb 11, who clearly lived in observance of the Torah and demonstrated a true faith in God, being recipients of His grace? The only consistent interpretation of “under Torah” in Rom 6:14 is to understand this phrase to mean “under the condemnation of the Torah.”²⁹

²⁶ Tim Hegg, Paul’s Epistle to the Romans Volume I, Chapters 1-8: Notes and Commentary (Washington: TorahResource, 2005), 167.

²⁷ Ibid., 168.

²⁸ Ibid., 169.

²⁹ Ibid.

Content

Verse 7

Verse seven begins with a formula often used by Paul in which he suspects there might be drawn a false inference by his readers from something he has just previously said in verses one through six in which he essentially explains how believers are not under (the condemnation of) the Torah but under grace. Paul emphatically denies that the being “under grace” would mean that the Torah is not relevant in the life of the believer, or that the Torah is opposed to grace. On the contrary, he states, “*I would not have come to know sin except through the Torah.*” The emphasis here is on the word ‘know’, for although someone might understand conceptually that they are sinners, without direct knowledge of the Torah of God, Paul understands that a person cannot know sin for what it truly is, i.e. direct rebellion against his Creator. He must see sin as God does, and therefore; how God describes and defines it in the Torah.

One may realize that it is wrong to covet without ever knowing the Torah. But one can hardly know that coveting is wrong because God forbids it, and that deliberately disobeying God is rebellion of the highest sort, unless one has an awareness of the Torah.

For Paul, his own situation is not unique, but common to all men; therefore, the Torah’s purpose is to lead man to Messiah and is only rightly understood in light of Him being the goal of the Torah. Second, apart from the Messiah and the Spirit He sends, the Torah will inevitably be misunderstood and misinterpreted. Finally, any attempt to live out the Torah apart from faith in Yeshua and the enabling of the Spirit, ends only in futility and death, not life.³⁰

Verse 8 Through Verse 11

Even before the Torah was given, sin clearly was manifest in the world; however, relatively speaking sin did not have the power of conviction and sentencing until the Torah

³⁰ Tim Hegg, *Paul’s Epistle to the Romans Volume I, Chapters 1-8: Notes and Commentary* (Washington: TorahResource, 2005), 174.

prescribed the curses for rebellion against the Lord. In the phrase, “*For apart from the Torah sin is dead,*” ‘dead’ may be understood as “inactive” (cf. James 2:17, 26). In the absence of Torah, sin is relatively powerless (cf. 1 Co 15:56), and comparing the Genesis narrative shows that the serpent was only able to attack Adam and Even because the commandment of Gen 2:17 had been given.³¹

It must also be noted that Paul uses the term “the commandment” as synonymous with “the law/Torah.” Thus, when Paul says “*but sin, taking opportunity through the commandment,*” he means to say that sin took opportunity through the Torah. Furthermore, evidence of Paul’s specific use of the singular “commandment” with article can be seen elsewhere in his works such as 1 Tim 6:14 and it is also a common usage in the *Tanach* to denote the entire Torah or a particular body of commandments.³² This is also true of rabbinic literature; therefore, when no specific commandment is in view, this usage by Paul is best understood to have the entire Law/Torah in view.

There have been many ideas set forth as to what Paul means when he says “*I was once alive apart from the Torah, but when the commandment came, sin became alive, and I died.*” Calvin seems to have understood this passage the best according to its historical-grammatical sense when he states:

He means to intimate that there had been a time when sin was dead to him or in him. But he is not to be understood as though he had been without law at any time, but his word I was alive has peculiar import; for it was the absence of the law that was the reason why he was alive; that is, why he being inflated with a conceit as to his own righteousness, claimed life to himself while he was yet dead... It may be asked, what time was that when through his ignorance of the law, or as he himself says, through the absence of it, he confidently laid claim to life. It is indeed certain, that he had been taught the doctrine of the law from his childhood; but it was the theology of the letter, which does not humble its disciples, for as he says elsewhere, the veil interposed so that the Jews could not see the light of life in the law; so also he himself,

³¹ Tim Hegg, *Paul’s Epistle to the Romans Volume I, Chapters 1-8: Notes and Commentary* (Washington: TorahResource, 2005), 177.

³² *Ibid.*

while he had his eyes veiled, being destitute of the Spirit of Christ, was satisfied with the outward mask of righteousness. Hence he represents the law as absent, though before his eyes, while it did not really impress him with the conscience of God's judgment. Thus, the eyes of hypocrites are covered with a veil, that they see not how much that command requires, in which we are forbidden to lust or covet.³³

Looking more closely at the action metaphor "*the commandment came,*" readers will note that Paul recognizes that there was a time in his life, even though he had been raised from birth with the mental knowledge of the Torah, (excelling beyond all his peers) that the Torah had not functioned to bring about true repentance and faith in his life (which is the goal of the Torah, even Yeshua).³⁴ Therefore, the "coming of the Torah," in this context, can be understood to mean the activity whereby the Torah functions through the work of the Spirit to convict and make known to the sinner the condition of their depravity and rebellion before God and against His Messiah.

For Paul, this function of the Torah did not come until by faith he understood the goal to which the Torah moves, that is, Yeshua. Once having seen Yeshua through the eyes of faith, the Torah functioned as it was intended to, in the hands of the Spirit, and showed Paul's sinfulness to be what it truly was—rebellion against HaShem. What is more, by the illumination of the Spirit, the Torah left Paul without hope apart from Yeshua, for it clearly described a standard of righteousness which no one, including Paul, could hope to attain by one's own efforts. Before Paul was granted faith to believe, the Torah existed as "letter," and God did not give the Torah to be "letter." The divine purpose of the Torah (to show Messiah) was nonexistent for the unbelieving Paul, and he thus arrogantly felt he had no problem with sin or death. But when faith was granted him, he saw (for the first time) the Torah through the eyes of the Spirit, and the unveiled glories of Messiah, and this exposed his own sin as utter rebellion and made him see the death penalty under which he stood guilty...But the very fact that the Torah contains both blessings and curses indicates that its further function was to expose those among the nation who had no faith, and who would then, attempt on their own merits to gain the life that only faith could bring.³⁵

In verse 11 Paul says, "*For sin, taking opportunity through the commandment [Torah], deceived me, and through it killed me.*" Some scholars such as Carson and Moo interpret this part of Romans as stating, "Likewise the law, which because of sin, made the situation of people

³³ John Calvin, *Commentaries*, 22 vols. (Baker Book House, 1984 reprint), *Romans* vol. 19, 268.

³⁴ Tim Hegg, *Paul's Epistle to the Romans Volume I, Chapters 1-8: Notes and Commentary* (Washington: TorahResource, 2005), 179.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

worse instead of better, no longer holds sway over the believer (Rom 7:1-25).”³⁶ In this view the Law is seen as the primary cause of the problem for man (rather than sin), although Carson and Moo do believe sin was also involved in the process. However, for interpreters like Carson and Moo they see the Law as no longer holding sway over the believer, or in other words, no longer applicable to their lives. Rather than emphasizing the sin, Carson and Moo emphasize the Law as what man is “freed from” and through that “release,” believers are immediately assured some type of constant and vague victory over sin.³⁷ It is clear that this is their intent here, because their preceding statements imply directly that “sin, the law, death and the flesh” are all those “powers” to which “Christians still must battle” in this “present realm.”³⁸ However, Paul does not include the Law as something to be battled, although it is an element in the battle. Paul would agree that sin and the flesh (which result in death) are to be battled, and he specifically states that his “flesh” rejects the Law, while his regenerated spirit accepts and desires to follow it. So clearly the Torah is not something that Paul battled against, rather, it was his flesh with which he battled and sought to submit it to God’s Torah.

Furthermore, this author would argue that the specific statement by Carson and Moo quoted above would be more correct had they switched their emphasis, stating instead for example, “Sin, which because of the law, made the situation of people worse instead of better, [but through faith in Jesus, sin] no longer holds sway over the believer.” Carson and Moo do go on to state in the next few lines of their analysis that, “Through the agency of God’s Spirit, the Christian is assured of final victory over death and the power of the flesh (8:1-13).”³⁹ But

³⁶ D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Michigan: Zondervan, 2005), 392.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

because they have eliminated the Law/Torah as having authority over the believer's life, and believe it is actually something a believer should battle against, they have eliminated the very tool God uses via the illumination of the Spirit to transform the flesh of the believer and make it submit to God thereby directing the path of the believer in righteous living. By submitting their flesh to the Torah of God, the believer actually manifests in practical terms that what Carson and Moo stated; "claiming victory over death and the power of the flesh."

Verse 12 Through Verse 23

Just as the death of the women's husband in chapter 6 of Romans did not free her from obedience to other aspects of the Torah, so also the believer's death with Messiah only frees him from the covenant relationship he had previously made with sin and death itself, enabling him to be joined to Christ. David Stern in his commentary on Romans notes:

We have died to and therefore been released from, (1) our own propensity to turn it [the Torah] into a framework of legalism, (2) irremediable guilt feelings which follow disobeying it, and (3) the Torah's penalties and curses for disobeying it...As a result of our release from the aspect of Torah that produces *fruit for death*, we are serving in the new way provided by the Spirit, who has *written the Torah in our hearts*...and not in the old way of outwardly following the letter of the law. Clearly, if the Torah has been written in the hearts of believers they are not released from every aspect of it.

Here is what I consider a better model: when a person comes to trust in Yeshua he surrenders to Him all of himself that he can. But as he grows in his faith he finds previously hidden portions of himself, areas of sin he was formerly unaware of, which he must surrender as well. Preceding each such surrender is a "Romans 7 experience," and the surrender takes place only when he is willing to move into Romans 8 with respect to that part of his life.⁴⁰

Paul states in verse 13 and 14,

³⁹ D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Michigan: Zondervan, 2005), 392.

⁴⁰ David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 5th ed. (Maryland: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1996), 376-377.

*“Did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful. For we **know** that the **Torah** is **spiritual**; but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.”*

In these verses we should focus in on the term “spiritual” in reference to the Torah, and this element is something for which Paul is confident both he and his readers “know.” Except for 1 Pt 2:5, where the word is used twice, Paul alone uses the word *pneumatikos* in the Apostolic Writings.⁴¹

Taken as a whole these passages would indicate that the term, in its broadest sense, means that which is connected to the eternal as over against the temporal, that which pertains to righteousness as over against sinfulness...But the use of the term...must also indicate that Paul intended us to understand that the Torah, in functioning within the scope of God’s salvific plan, was also to be vitally connected to the Spirit as passages like the following indicate: Mat 22:43, Mk 12:36; Acts 1:16; 4:25; 28:25; 2 Pt 1:21. Indeed, the giving of a “new heart,” or a “heart of flesh” is a repeated motif in Ezekiel...and the new heart is that mind or soul which has been enlivened by the Spirit. Thus those who do not have the Spirit grasp only the letter, and the letter without the Spirit kills.⁴²

So having understood that the Torah is Spirit in contrast to sinful flesh, some people have had a hard time understanding how Paul could claim on the one hand freedom in Christ and in this verse remark that he is “*of flesh, sold into bondage to sin,*” in the present tense no less.⁴³ The key is to understand that by flesh, Paul means his bent toward sin due to his connection with Adam which remains until he leaves this mortal life.

The point seems to be that if in Adam all died, and all received the sin nature, then until mortality inherited from Adam is done away (i.e., when death gives way to eternal life), there remains a sense of being connected to the sin which one simply cannot finally eradicate. This produces the “groaning” of which Paul speaks (8:22-23).⁴⁴

When Paul from verse 15 through 22, laments the fact that he does not comprehend sometimes his own “Jekyll and Hyde” type behavior, we can understand the phrase in verse 15, “*I do not know,*” as meaning I do not “acknowledge” in the sense of “approve,” like saying what

⁴¹ Tim Hegg, Paul’s Epistle to the Romans Volume I, Chapters 1-8: Notes and Commentary (Washington: TorahResource, 2005), 182.

⁴² Ibid., 183.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

I am doing I do not condone, and this seems to be reiterated in the final clause, “*I am doing the very thing I hate.*”⁴⁵ The entire struggle comes because of the presence of the Spirit in Paul’s life, since we know that he had no struggle obeying the Torah prior to his salvation. Implied in Paul’s teaching is the idea that the fact that he and other believers struggle with their flesh, which wars against God’s Torah, is evidence of their new nature in Christ; because without that new nature, there would be no struggle (of this kind) against their sin nature. Therefore,

The “good thing” which Paul lacks in his flesh is the ability to obey God in doing His will. This is not a fault of God’s creative power, but is the result of the sinful nature inherited from fallen Adam. Each of us, in our fallen natures, participates in Adam’s rebellion against God. For Paul, the term “flesh” indicates that sinful bent of mankind inherited from Adam (5:12) and which, apart from the gracious work of the Almighty in the awakening and regenerational work of the Spirit, can do nothing but please self. **This, of course, is not the natural thinking of the sinner!**...Paul here makes it clear that the pursuit of holiness is an effort carried out, not by the efforts of one’s fallen nature, but through the strength that comes by the Holy Spirit.⁴⁶

We also note that Paul qualifies the nature of this “helplessness” as coming only when he is acting “in his flesh.” The fact that the Spirit now lives in Paul is the only reason he recognizes a desire for true holiness that was not there before. Calvin explains best what Paul meant when Paul seems to indicate that he can do no good at all, rather:

He does not mean that he had nothing but an ineffectual desire, but his meaning is, that the work really done did not correspond to his will; for the flesh hindered him from doing perfectly what he did. So also understand what follows, the evil I desire not, that I do: for the flesh not only impedes the faithful, so that they cannot run swiftly, but it sets also before them many obstacles at which they stumble.⁴⁷

Verse 24 Through Verse 25

Once again in these last verses we find the crux of the issue, that of sin and how it is dealt with. “Paul the Pharisee, has come through the eyes of faith to see the righteous requirements of

⁴⁵ Tim Hegg, *Paul’s Epistle to the Romans Volume I, Chapters 1-8: Notes and Commentary* (Washington: TorahResource, 2005), 184.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 185.

⁴⁷ John Calvin, *Commentaries*, 22 vols. (Baker Book House, 1984 reprint), *Romans* vol. 19, 268.

the Torah as well above his present ability.”⁴⁸ Yet regeneration of his soul has made him desire nothing less than full righteousness before his God. His hope rests not on his growing ability to actually keep God’s Torah from a right heart, but his hope lies totally in the Person of Messiah. “He finds in the Messiah not only One who would teach the explain the Torah perfectly—not only One who would capture the heart of the nations and turn them to the One and only true God, but he sees in Yeshua the only One able to finally and eternally transform his sinful nature into a completely righteous one.”⁴⁹ Even more so it is a righteousness that is prescribed in the revelation of God’s own person, first revealed in the written Torah of Moses, and especially seen in the revelation of the Living Torah, Yeshua the Messiah our Lord.

Application

The personal application associated with above analyzed passage is two fold. First, it is the realization that if believers strive in their flesh to obey God, they will fail. They must study God’s Torah, understand God’s instructions, let the Holy Spirit illuminate those truths and bring them to bear in our lives; otherwise they will fail to mature in their faith.

Second, if believers try to determine right and wrong, or define sin by the world’s standards or their own imaginations, they will remain in their flesh and bear bad fruit in their lives. However, because God has given both His Living and Written Torah, which is His revealed wisdom, instruction, and teaching regarding right living and the definition of sin, believers can over time allow the Spirit of God to reveal to them, through God’s Torah, those areas in which they fall short of God’s standard for their lives. But such a view into the “perfect Torah” as James puts it, will ultimately result in a struggle or fight in which a believer will have

⁴⁸ Tim Hegg, Paul’s Epistle to the Romans Volume I, Chapters 1-8: Notes and Commentary (Washington: TorahResource, 2005), 190.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

to chose to overcome the desires of their flesh and allow the Spirit of God to reshape their hearts and minds according to His Word. But with every victory, the believer will grow stronger in their faith, and become a better witness of faith they cling to in Messiah.

Finally, believers must be willing to reconsider their perspective of Paul in light of the historical grammatical reality that reveals the fact that Paul did not teach that the Torah was done away with, but rather, it was the very goal to which his heart desired to live and was according to the *halachah* to which he taught his churches. The fact that believers will fall short, or that they can not observe all of God’s Torah should not deter them from doing that which they are capable of doing. For such an attitude and approach demonstrates a heart that desires to please God out of the love that the believer has for God, just as Jesus Himself said, “If you love me you will keep my commandments⁵⁰...If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.⁵¹”

⁵⁰ John 14:15

⁵¹ John 15:10

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