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Romans

If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good.

Romans 7:16

This verse is an obvious truth. If the thing that I will to do, which is based on the law (see the previous verse's example concerning the people of Israel at the giving of the law), is the thing that I don't practice, and the thing that I do is the thing I will not to do (which is something contrary to the law), then "I agree with the law that it is good."

To get this straight, because the wording can be hard to grasp, just think of a law which is good and reasonable - say for example, keeping the posted speed limit of 40 mph. I want to keep the law, and probably for more than one reason. For example, I know the law is there to protect others. I certainly don't want to run over other people. The law is there to protect property. I don't want to skid out of control because I am driving faster than what is prudent (and road engineers are always right...). The law is also there to protect me. I don't want to end up in the hospital or in a wooden box. For these and other reasons (like maybe getting a speeding ticket), I will to do the law.

However, this is the thing that I don't practice. I don't pay attention sometimes; I go 45 without realizing it. Maybe I'm late for an appointment and so I speed, promising myself that it's just this one time. Or, I may have a broken speedometer and my guesswork is faulty concerning the rate I'm travelling at. I'm not doing what I actually will to do in each case, even in the "late for the appointment" thing. This is true because I wouldn't have otherwise "promised myself" anything.

In all three of the instances, I had something bad happen. When I wasn't paying attention, I ran someone over. When I was late for the appointment, I lost control and took out four mailboxes and a yard gnome. When my speedometer was broken, I got a \$250.00 speeding ticket by the local sheriff. The thing I willed to do, which was to obey the law and avoid all of these things, is the thing I failed to do. And the thing that willed not to do, which was to break the law and have all these terrible things result, well, that is what I did and I suffered the consequences.

Because of these things, I have to agree that the law is good. This is exactly what Paul is telling us. God gave Adam and Eve a law and He had His good reasons for doing so. When they broke that law and received the just penalty for their violation, I guarantee they agreed that the law was good. In fact, one premise of the Bible after that point is that we have been trying to get back to "Eden" ever since. Regardless of whether we're doing it the right way or not, everyone is looking for something better. We know this world is a world of fault ending in death and we have to agree that the law was, in fact, good. Every law introduced by God since that time has contained the same over-arching truth.

Life application: Far too often when we break a law, we attempt to divert the blame elsewhere. It is so much easier to do this, but if we are honest with ourselves, we have to admit our faults and agree that if the law was a good and just law, that we failed. This is particularly true with God's laws. When you fall short of His requirements, confess it and ask Him to redirect you toward obedience.

But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. Romans 7:17

Paul continues to personify sin. He shows the contrast between Sin and himself. The sin in him causes him to take actions contrary to the will that he wishes he could exercise. All of this was made known by the introduction of the law, but it isn't the law's fault that these things have come about. He (and thus we, because he is speaking in terms of his human nature) is being shown the truth of his nature and the contrast which wars inside of him.

And even the unregenerate know of this war in their soul. It is universally displayed in humanity - in their writings, in movies, in plays, in daily life too. Cultures and people talk about sin in terms that show us that they understand the war, even if they haven't properly identified how it works. Paul, by divine inspiration, is showing us the truth of the matter.

When we call on Christ, we are "sealed" with the Holy Spirit. This is an indwelling that previously didn't exist. There will be a point of relief from this battle, but it is a battle. Hence we speak of "indwelling sin" in the believer as well. The two are at war and this is highlighted when we call on Christ. Let us not turn our eyes from the truths Paul will continue to reveal to us.

Life application: Yes, sin dwells in me, but greater than sin is the presence of the Holy Spirit - available to all who have called on Christ. It is He who can give us victory over the fleshly man. Let us remember that this "filling" of the Spirit is revealed as passive in nature. We must grant it to Him through the development of our Christian walk. Let us welcome the Spirit through study, prayer, fellowship, and a life which is obedient to Christ our Lord.

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. Romans 7:18

It was previously noted that Paul's personal pronoun "I" is being used to speak of his humanity and thus it is something that pertains to all of us. "For I know" is written to take us back to his statement that he "is carnal, sold under sin." This is now referred to as his "flesh." The physical being of man is fallen and in us "nothing good dwells." This is a state known as "total depravity." However, this term is perceived by scholars in a variety of ways.

Some go to the extreme that we are utterly corrupt and incapable of doing good or even responding to good. In essence, the image of God in man has been erased or is so significantly marred that we are utterly fallen, corrupt, and wicked. Others see total depravity as the image of God being effaced in man. There is nothing

good in and of ourselves, but we can see what is good, respond to what is good, and choose what is good. The image of God is marred, but it is still a noticeable trait of man. A third option is that we are fallen, but there is goodness in us none-the-less.

The first option is obviously incorrect. The Bible states that we must "believe" certain things in order to be saved. The Bible notes that as fallen sons of Adam, we must respond, accept God's gift, receive, etc. If we were totally depraved, such as Calvinists claim, this wouldn't be possible. We would have to make up a new doctrine - being regenerated in order to believe, then believing, then being saved. In essence, we would be saved before we were saved. This is convoluted thinking.

The third option isn't allowed by what Paul states here and elsewhere. We have no innate goodness in us. When something good is marred, it is no longer good. It is defective.

However, there is a suitable middle ground. Man is fallen, the image of God in him is marred, but he has been given intelligence and the ability to see that which is good. With that intelligence, he can choose the good or choose the bad. This is what the Bible shows us, time and time again and in both testaments. It is a category mistake to say that because we are depraved and spiritually dead, that we cannot see what is good and reach out for it. And the rest of Paul's comments in this verse verifies this.

Nothing good dwells in our flesh, but "for to will is present with me." How can someone claim that total depravity requires us to be regenerated first in order to believe? The will, which Paul has already said wants to do good is obviously capable of seeing the good or it wouldn't will to do good at all! The answer to our dilemma will be found before the end of the chapter. It will explain "how to perform what is good." The thing that Paul (and thus all of us) couldn't find is presented to humanity as a gift. As beings with free will, we must reach out and accept this gift.

Life application: Proverbs states, "The first one to plead his cause seems right, Until his neighbor comes and examines him." (18:17) This is true in many ways, including theology. Listen carefully to various viewpoints, pray for the Lord to open your heart and understanding to the truth, and use the brains God has given you to reject what is wrong. One error in theology invariably leads down paths of more errors. Be sound in your doctrine and be approved in your theology.

For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Romans 7:19

This sentiment is very similar to 7:15 - "For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do." These parallel sentiments show us, quite clearly for even the hardest head to think through, that we have a will which desires to do good. This is so obvious that Paul has said it twice, hoping that we won't mistake the fact... and yet we do. We come up with irregular doctrines which deny free will in order to establish boxes and limiting parameters which actually don't exist.

The term "free will" is used to indicate that we have the ability to make choices - we see the good and, hopefully, choose the good. However, the use of the term free will isn't meant to show that we are always able to exercise this will so that it is manifest in our fleshly body. Paul shows that we will to do good - this is our free, volitional will. However, this good that we will to do is not what we end up doing - this is the limiting factor on our will; restriction of the exercise of what we will.

Instead of exercising this will as we often desire, we take the opposite course of action. Our flesh, our carnal selves, cause us to practice "the evil I will not to do." We should put the stress on "I" throughout these verses. Anytime "I" is introduced it will end in fault. It happened in Eden and it has continued to happen throughout history as people have set aside His good law(s) and attempted to merit His favor on their own. The fact is, that if intent to do good was good enough, then the majority of the people of the world would be on the highway to heaven. However, intent inevitably leads to failure when "I" is involved. The flesh thrives on the "I" of our carnal selves.

The free will we are given, and it is indeed a gift of God's grace, is not for the exercise of "I" but for the choice for God. The doctrine of grace is not abolished through the teaching of free will as Calvinists claim; it is established. First, as a grace, we have been given this gift, and as a grace this gift continues in us, even after the fall. Free will, as was noted by Thomas Aquinas in our evaluation of Romans 7:13, was what caused the fall. To state otherwise would be to ascribe the fault (the sin) to God. Secondly, the exercising of one's free will in "choosing the good we see" in no way implies that we are able to either subjugate the evil, nor accomplish the good.

These are graces which are bestowed upon us after we make the choice. God does the work and we receive it by faith. Thus grace is fully established in the doctrine of free will. Calvinism, in this respect, is so far from the truth of the doctrine of Paul, that to accept it is to inevitably be led down one wrong path after another.

Life application: When reading the Bible, the simplest and most obvious explanation in the reading of the text is the wisest choice. However, this cannot be applied to single verses which have been ripped out of context. Instead, everything must remain in context and then be taken with the obvious intent of the wording. You have been given free will to accept or reject this premise, choose well.

Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. Romans 7:20

This verse repeats and consolidates the thought of verses 16 and 17. Why would Paul do this, saying the same thing a second time? The reason is that it is highlighting the issue and it is verifying the two "for's" found in verses 18 & 19. In other words, he is being extremely precise in his thoughts. These thoughts could be considered improperly contemplated and relayed by a surface review of the wording.

In order to substantiate that he is, in fact, correct in his analysis, he has stated the truth of the matter (verses 16 & 17), and then defended it in a way which highlighted the truth of his thoughts (verses 18 & 19), and then restated what has been found to be correct in the first place.

Sometimes it's important to state the same thing more than once so that it can be properly understood. With a few intervening words of explanation, a matter can be verified and then repeated. So, sometimes it's important to state the same thing more than once so that it can be properly understood.

Life application: Repetition can never harm when instructing others in complicated matters. Also, repetition can never harm when instructing others in complicated matters.