



Group Discussion Guide

Romans 7:13-25

For groups meeting April 5 evening through April 12 morning.

In the opening verse of this week's reading, Paul cleared up any confusion that might be left from his discussion about the law and sin from the first part of the chapter. It was sin – not the law – that produced death in him "through what is good" (the law, v. 13). Here Paul also wrote that this intersection of sin and the law helped identify sin. In verse 14 there seems to be a transition in Paul's writing. He moved from using other tenses (imperfect and aorist) to using present tense. He indicated why he was unable to keep the law: "the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh," (v. 14). Also of interest is his present tense description of himself as "sold under sin," (v. 14). Why did the apostle see himself as a slave to sin when he had written earlier in this letter, "For one who has died has been set free from sin," (Romans 6:7) and "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus," (Romans 6:11)?

It is important to understand the point of Paul's writing in this section of Romans. The transition to present tense shows the reader that Paul was now writing about his current battle with sin, even as a believer in Jesus Christ. He wrote that he was not able to understand his behavior of "not doing what I want" and instead "doing the very thing I hate," (v. 15). Two key words are paramount to correctly interpreting his writing here: "want" and "hate." Paul was stating that his desires had in fact changed. He *wanted* what was right according to the law (v. 16) and *hated* what was wrong. His struggle was in living consistently *according to* these new desires, because of the reality of his unrighteous "flesh," which he wrote about in verse 18. He even stated that when he did what he did not want to do, "it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me," (v. 17, and similarly stated in v. 20).

Paul wrote that he had discovered a principle that was consistent: "when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand," (v. 21). The reason evil was always ready to attack was that Paul – like every believer – still had a sinful nature. It was not the core of his being and it did not have control over him, because as one who had been set free from sin, he delighted in the ways of God (v. 22). However, it did influence him and it did affect his decisions at times. He wrote that this battle was between his "members" and his "mind," (v. 23). This wording gives us the idea that Paul's innermost desires to obey God were at odds with his sinful nature that attempted to use his body as its playground. And this is what brings the reader to the climax of Paul's inner conflict, vividly referenced in verse 24: "Wretched man that I am! ... Who will deliver me from this body of death?" His very next step was to praise the only One who could deliver him, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (v. 25). The battle would continue until Paul breathed his last, but the victory already had been won by Jesus.

Discussion Questions

1. Earlier in Romans, Paul had written that believers were no longer slaves to sin. Why then, do you think he referred to himself as being “sold under sin” (v. 14)?
2. Can you identify with Paul’s statement, “I do not understand my own actions,” (v. 15)?
3. If we who believe have experienced a change in our desires, so that we now desire to do things God’s way ... why do you think we also at times have a desire to disobey God?
4. Is Paul trying to deflect personal responsibility for his own disobedience when he writes, “it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me,”? Explain your answer.
5. In your own words, describe the sin nature that is still present in the life of believer.
6. Have you experienced the principle that Paul references in verse 21? How does this play out in your life?
7. Overall, does Paul’s own struggle with his sin nature encourage you? Why or why not? How can you use this passage to help others who are struggling in their walk with Christ, or perhaps even doubting their standing as a child of God?