

"I Am Carnal, Sold Under Sin"

"For we know the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I know not: for not what I would, that do I practice; but what I hate, that I do" (Rom. 7:14f). This section from Romans seven has generated much debate. When Paul speaks of himself, at what point in his life was he speaking; the present or the past? Did he describe himself and all others who like him were Christians? He does use the present tense and thus some commentaries (particularly the Calvinists) understand him to speak of his present state as a Christian. But there are problems with this view, notably that the writer speaks of this same state and says, *"Wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me out of the body of this death"* (Rom. 7:24)? Are we to conclude that the forgiven Christian is a wretched man, sold under sin? This can hardly be so. In just the prior chapter the apostle taught that *"our old man was crucified with Christ that the body of sin might be done away that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin ..."* (Rom. 6:6). In verse 22 he adds, *"being made free from sin, ye became servants of God."* If Christians are *"no longer in bondage to sin"* and *"made free from sin"* then it cannot be said of them that they are *"carnal, sold under sin."*

I believe that in the passage from Romans 7:14 the apostle describes the unregenerate sinner before Christ comes into his life. Surely the apostle is not speaking of the Christian when he writes, *"For that which I do, I know not."* What does he mean by these words? Unless a man is deranged, he is conscious of what he does. Still a man may be conscious of what he does but not be conscious of its import or impact. Jews and Romans together crucified Jesus Christ. They knew they were crucifying a man, but were they really conscious of who he was? Jesus prayed, *"Father forgive them, for they know not what they do"* (Luke 23:34). Peter told his Jewish audience, *"I know that in ignorance ye did it, as also did your rulers"* (Acts 3:17). Paul acted in the same way. Did he recognize that Christians were right? He did not. *"I verily thought within myself I should do many contrary to the name of Jesus,"* he said (Acts 26:9). And again, *"Howbeit I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief"* (1 Tim. 1:13). Thus of the time before he became a Christian he said, *"For that which I do, I know not."* In the same way he wrote, *"for not what I would that do I practice."* Paul did not desire to live in rebellion to God, to disobey Him. Thus he could say, *"That which I hate, that I do."* He did what he hated because he did not perceive he was fighting against God. *"But if what I would not, that I do, I consent unto the law that it is good"* (Rom. 7:16). Since *"through the law comes the knowledge of sin,"* the spiritual part of man (which desires to do right) could be grateful that law reveals what sin is. And, through the gospel man is de-

livered from the bondage of it (Rom. 3:20; 7:24). NEXT: "With The Mind, Serve Indeed The Law Of God."

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