

• A description of the unconverted person struggling unsuccessfully against sin

• Complete failure... a slave to sin

If the unconverted person tries 'in the flesh' to cease from coveting and to cease desiring sin, what he will discover is that sin will become more powerful than ever! Not everyone goes through this agony before they are saved, but some do. Verse 14 begins to explain and expound the statement in verse 13. ¹⁴*For I know (on the one hand) that the law is spiritual but I myself (on the other hand) am carnal, sold into bondage by sin.* The Greek can be translated as 'we know' (*oidamen*) or as 'I know, on the one hand' (*oida men*). Since Paul says 'me . . . me' in verse 13 and continues 'I . . . I' through the rest of the paragraph, it is likely that 'I' is to be found here. Paul still has the tenth commandment in mind. Paul is repeating the thought of verse 5. This person under the law is utterly and totally a slave to sin. He is totally bewildered in his struggle against sin. ¹⁵*For I do not understand what I am doing. For the thing that I do is not what I want to do, but what I am hating is the very thing I do.* This is radical and serious failure. This is a description of the person who sees the spirituality of the law and desires to keep it, yet is unconverted. What can the law of God do for him? It only brings him to see the exceeding sinfulness of sin¹, because he is carnal², a slave³, as is seen in his general defeat⁴.

1 7:13
2 7:14
3 7:14
4 7:15

Paul makes two deductions

• Firstly – the law is entirely good

• Secondly – the law produces a duality: I don't want to do it, but I do do it!

Now in verses 16 and 17 we have two deductions from all of this. The first deduction is this: ¹⁶*And if I do the very thing that I do not wish to do, I am agreeing that the law is good.* In the experience of conviction of sin I am not regarding the tenth commandment as an evil thing. The law is entirely good, but it is used by God to demonstrate that I am thoroughly evil and wicked!

Then comes Paul's second deduction. ¹⁷*But now it is no longer I that am working this thing but rather it is sin which is living inside me.* Here is an unregenerate person. He is not the normal unregenerate person (who definitely does not have the kind of spiritual insight we see here!). But on the other hand he is definitely not the normal regenerate person either, who certainly cannot describe himself as a slave and defeated, and so on. The best the law can do in an unconverted person is produce a duality. Here is a person with a divided being. It is not 'me' doing this thing (if the bad English may be forgiven!), yet sin is dwelling in 'me'. It **is** me but it is **not** me. I **don't** want to do it but I do do it. The best the law can do is produce a state in me where I deny and disown what I am doing – and yet I still do it.

The power of sin

• Overrides all my good intentions

Verses 18 to 20 explain this last point in verse 17 more fully. ¹⁸*For I know that there does not dwell in me, that is in my flesh, any good thing. For the desire to do the good thing is present with me, but to carry it out is not!* Keep in mind, we are dealing with the unconverted person who – although he is unconverted – is intensely seeking to carry out the law, especially the tenth commandment. ¹⁹*For I do not do the good thing I want to do, but instead the bad thing I do not want to do is the very thing I do.* Verse 19 more or less repeats verse 15. This person is a permanent failure despite all of his desires. There is a clash between wanting and doing. Verse 20 repeats the thought of 17. ²⁰*And if what I do not want is the very thing I do, it is no longer I that am working this thing but it is this sin dwelling in me.* Here again he mentions this state where I deny and disown what I am doing – and yet I do it! The power of sin overrides all my good intentions. Here again is the very best state that an unconverted person can get to, as he struggles to be spiritual by keeping the tenth commandment.

• Is actually more powerful

Now verse 21 lays down another statement and goes a step further. So *then* – he is summarizing where he has got to in his argument – *I find this*

than the law of God

• Godly living needs a completely different approach

• Interruption - a burst of praise!

Final conclusion

• Trying to achieve holiness by the law is service to the law of sin

law belongs to me, although I want to do the good thing, that the evil thing is close by me. The powerful working of sin in my life is actually more powerful than the law of God, and the law of God is insufficient to overthrow it. ²²For I happily agree with the law of God in the inner man ²³but I see another law in my members at war with the law of my mind and taking me captive with the law of sin which is in my members. This person is totally incapable of throwing off the powerful domineering 'law' of sin. He needs to be in an entirely different position before he will be able to live a godly life. Verse 24 follows. *Miserable person that I am! Who shall deliver me out of the body of this death!* He is unhappy; he is ignorant of Christ and is in despair.

At this point it is as though Paul can bear the strain and the gloom of this chapter no more. He interrupts with an inserted burst of praise. ²⁵*Thanks be to God through our Lord Jesus Christ!* It certainly is an interruption. Paul is not saying, 'Thanks be to God that I am miserable!' And he is not saying, 'Thanks be to God that I serve the law of God with my mind but with my flesh serve the law of sin.' Paul's remark does not connect either with what precedes or with what follows. It is an interruption from Paul the Christian!

Then he comes to a final conclusion and summary. *So then I myself on the one hand serve the law of God with the mind but with the flesh I serve the law of sin.* This is how sin works when someone is seeking holiness by the law. Paul is writing this description in order to persuade us not to go back to the unconverted way of trying to keep the law of God. It never helped us when we were unsaved. It will not help us now! For a Christian to go back to the Mosaic law is the same mistake as for him to go back to sin. To turn to Mosaic law-keeping is backsliding, as much as moral sin. Both are turning away from the gospel. Both will bring forth fruit unto death.



Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His *Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)* books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.



These specially reformatted chapters "Slices of Bread" produced by Sovereign World Trust are available in three categories as set out below

Slices for the Nations	Slices for Sponsors	Slices for Everyone / Slice of the Week
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For pastors, libraries and colleges in those parts of the world where resources are scarce and unaffordable In the fullness of time the whole series will be made available free of charge Weekly emailings of 3 - 4 Slices or available to download from the <i>Slices</i> web site 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For those in more prosperous circumstances who can afford to contribute to the development of this material and its distribution with a small monthly donation The same material as Slices for the Nations Weekly emailings of 3 - 4 Slices or by download from the <i>Slices</i> web site 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For those who wish to sample the material or dip into it from time to time, a proportion of the PTTB series is available free of charge Slices for Everyone (as a download) or Slice of the Week (attached to a weekly email) The remainder of the PTTB material is available to Sponsors and those eligible to receive Slices for the Nations

To subscribe please contact: slicesofbread@sovereignworldtrust.org.uk stating which category fits your situation. Further details are at www.slices.org.uk
 Details of the availability of *Preaching Through The Bible* books and how they may be purchased can be found on www.ibtr.org.uk