

## Romans 7:14-25

### How to Change from Our Ways to God's Way

**Introduction:** We have all experienced the feeling of doing something we are ashamed of, but not being able to stop ourselves. Conversely, we have all experienced the shame of *not* doing something we knew we should have. Why do we behave like that? The reading set for today addresses this very question.

Before we get to that, let us hear what Jesus said about our problem: Mark 7:20:

It is what comes out of a man that makes him unclean. For from within, out of our hearts come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from within and make one unclean.

Other parts of the Scriptures make the same point, but it is in Romans 7:14-25 where we find the most compelling description of our problem. For example, verses 21 to 24:

So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil lies right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work in my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

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What all this means is that, going right back to the beginning when sin entered the world, humanity became tainted with a nature that was biased towards doing what we wanted to do and not towards what God wanted us to do.

We see evidence of this every night on the TV News; murders, terrorism, domestic violence, corruption, and much, much more. If we are honest we see it in our own lives as well.

This sense of frustration at our sinfulness finds expression in the prayer of confession in our Prayer Book:

We have strayed from your ways like lost sheep.

We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own heart.

We have offended against your holy laws.

We have left undone what we ought to have done,

And we have done what we ought not to have done.

What all this means is that sin in our heart is our biggest problem, and, like a terrible disease, if left untreated it will bring us under God's judgement. Well may Paul have cried out; 'Who will rescue me from the body of this death?'

Here is where the good news begins; verse 25, 'thanks be to God [I am rescued from this] through Jesus Christ.' This idea of deliverance takes us back to an earlier part of the letter to the Romans, Chapter 3:23-25:

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For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified [declared righteous] freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood.

What this means is that when we humbly ask God to forgive our sins and take us in, because of his atoning death for us, he not only answers our prayer with a 'yes' but adopts us as his own children.

And now, as our heavenly Father, he then begins his wonderful work in our heart whereby he helps us to rise above our old sinful nature and become more and more like him.

Take the very next paragraph after our set reading. It describes what happens to us when we *do* turn to him for grace. Romans 8:1:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law [the Ten Commandments] was powerless to do in that it was weakened by sinful nature, God did by sending his own son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. ..., in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

Paul's reference to the Holy Spirit points to the important new factor in our lives which helps us to change from what we are by nature to what God wants us to be.

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By God's help through his Spirit, we are enabled us to continue the struggle with those dark impulses, referred to by Jesus in Mark 7, and step by step to become more like Jesus.

This is what Paul refers to in Galatians 5:22:

The fruit of the Spirit [working in our heart] is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. For those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified [put to death] the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since [therefore] we live in the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

As we seek to turn our back on our old way and live lives worthy of our Lord, we should make it a matter of daily prayer that he will give us the will and the strength to live according to the Spirit and not according to the old sinful nature.

It won't always be easy. Sometimes we will slip back into the old ways. But do not be discouraged. God, through his Spirit, is with us and he will help us, bit by bit, to change.

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Let us give Paul the last word; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18:

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.