

Romans 7:13-25 Did that which is good, then, bring death to me?

By no means!

Even though we often feel small and insignificant (Psalm 8), matters of life and death which this passage speaks about are immensely important for all of us. Life and death in the Bible mean more than just physical life: they refer to spiritual life with, or without, God.

In his 4th rhetorical question in this section Paul asks, *How can something which is good bring death to me?* The answer is simple: it can't! It's bad things that bring death to us. Paul has in mind here the Law, following on from Romans 7v12. His main point here is that the Law is like a spotlight, which shines brightly on the real culprit, which is sin (Romans 7:13). Sin is the real problem with humanity and it is this for Jesus died, to be our true Saviour.

A description of our struggle with sin (7:13-20)

Let's just consider a bit more what we mean by 'law'. C.S. Lewis pointed out that when we argue we make an often unconscious appeal to a higher law, when we say things like, "How'd you like it if someone did that to you?"

Lewis says, "Quarrelling means trying to show that the other person is wrong. For example, there would be no sense in arguing that a footballer had committed a foul unless there was some agreement about the rules of football."

In any civilized society there seems to be a set of moral constants; in each one of us a moral compass, albeit a damaged moral compass. Lewis used this idea to point to the existence of God. For the Apostle Paul the existence of a higher moral law was self-evident, and furthermore it had been perfectly revealed by God at Sinai (Romans 7:14). Yet Paul acknowledged an inner moral code, even for those who had never heard of the Law of Moses, in some way written on our hearts (Romans 2:14-15). This moral awareness is the reason why we struggle with our failings. We betray this struggle when we say things like, "Why did I do that?" or "How could I be so stupid?" This is the kind of struggle with sin Paul is talking about in Romans 7:15-19, in relation to God's Law.

I don't think Paul was actually struggling with sin when he was writing this passage. Rather he was exploring the frustration we experience in our struggle with sin, no doubt a struggle he had also experienced. But having described the struggle, he comes to a conclusion that may surprise us (Romans 7:20). The real problem is not the 'real me' but 'sin that dwells within me.' We battle a foreign entity called sin. This doesn't absolve us of personal responsibility, because we have a responsibility to overcome it. But it's an explanation. Furthermore, this observation leads Paul to a discovery ...

A discovery of a law of sin (7:21-24)

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand (Romans 7:21). Rather like Sir Isaac Newton who found a law of gravity, supposedly when an apple fell on his head, so Paul finds a law of sin, dwelling in us, and working against us. The battlefield is the mind, and now we have two laws, waging war against each other (Romans 7:22-23). These laws have to do with life and death. We have a Law/Torah of God, and a law/torah of sin. It is as if sin, the imposter, has set up its own law/torah, holding us in slavish obedience, and “rewarding” us with death. On the other hand, the Law of God is the perfect law that gives freedom (James 1:25); that contains within it the foundations of godliness; whose aim is faith and love, which comes from a good heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith (1Timothy 1:5); that rewards us with eternal life when we put our trust in the One who can save us, Jesus Christ.

It is difficult to understand most of what Paul says in Romans without acknowledging the background of the Adam and Eve story in Genesis. Maybe there is a connection here also. There were two trees in the Garden, the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. It required complete trust (i.e. faith) and love for Adam and Eve to restrain from eating from the forbidden tree. But what is so bad about a knowledge of good and evil? I believe it was our first parents, and by extension all of us, saying, “We are no longer going to trust in God our Creator; are going to take into our own hands the knowledge of good and evil.” (see Isaiah 5:20 for a comparison.) In doing, so we become slaves to another law, a law of sin that holds us captive to do its will. We become deceived, our thinking becomes futile, and our foolish hearts are darkened (Romans 1:21). Paul cries out, *Who will deliver me from the body of this death?* (Romans 7:24). The answer of course is Jesus, who came to set us free and bless us with abundant life.

A deliverance from the law of sin (7:25)

Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin. (Romans 7:25)

The phrase, *Thanks be to God*, contains within it the idea of grace, rather like ‘saying grace’ before a meal. Paul is thanking the Lord for His grace that has come to save us. This is the irresistible grace of God that is just about impossible to get away from when it really starts working in our lives.

Jesus came (and comes) to set us free from this law of sin, that we may once more feed on Him in our hearts by faith (the Tree of Life),

John 6:53-54 *So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.*

This deliverance is real, and we can now count ourselves death to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:11). However as long as we live in the body of this flesh we will continue to experience the struggle and the battle of our minds. Sanctification is the process of giving ourselves in the obedience of faith to God leading to holiness, rather than giving ourselves back to the law of sin. The law of God is essentially a revelation of the perfect will of God, but is powerless to save, and without the Lord Jesus it only condemns. What we all need is the salvation comes from the LORD (Psalm 3:8).