

Romans 7:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.

Analysis

For we know that the law is spiritual—Pneumatikos (πνευματικός, "spiritual") means proceeding from the Holy Spirit, demanding heart-level obedience beyond external compliance. Law requires love, not mere behavioral conformity (Matthew 22:37-40). **But I am carnal, sold under sin**—Sarkinos (σάρκινος, "fleshly/carnal") describes the believer's remaining sin nature, not total depravity. Peprāmenos hypo tēn hamartian (πεπραμένος ὑπὸ τὴν ἀμαρτίαν, "sold under sin") uses perfect tense—ongoing state from past action.

This begins the disputed section (vv. 14-25): does Paul describe pre-Christian or Christian experience? The present tense "I am," personal pronouns, present struggle, delight in God's law (v. 22), and serving God's law with the mind (v. 25) argue for regenerate experience. Paul describes the believer's ongoing war with indwelling sin—not total dominion by sin (that's the unregenerate state) but real conflict with remaining corruption.

Historical Context

Reformed interpreters (Augustine, Luther, Calvin) consistently understood vv. 14-25 as describing the regenerate believer's struggle with remaining sin. The Wesleyan/Arminian tradition often sees this as pre-Christian experience, but contextual markers (delight in law, serving God with mind, present tense) support the regenerate view. Paul depicts sanctification as warfare, not instant perfection.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does recognizing this as the normal Christian experience (not just pre-conversion struggle) change your expectations for sanctification?
2. What comfort do you find in Paul's honest description of the conflict between law's spiritual demands and indwelling sin?
3. Where do you see evidence in your life of both 'serving the law of God with the mind' and struggling with remaining 'carnality'?

Interlinear Text

οἴδαμεν γὰρ ὅτι ὁ νόμος πνευματικός ἐστιν ἐγὼ δὲ
we know For that the law spiritual is I but
G1492 G1063 G3754 G3588 G3551 G4152 G2076 G1473 G1161

σάρκικός εἰμι πεπραμένος ὑπὸ τὴν ἀμαρτίαν
carnal am sold under sin
G4559 G1510 G4097 G5259 G3588 G266

Additional Cross-References

1 Kings 21:25 (Parallel theme): But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up.

2 Kings 17:17 (Parallel theme): And they caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire, and used divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger.

1 Kings 21:20 (Parallel theme): And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? And he answered, I have found thee: because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the LORD.

Isaiah 52:3 (Parallel theme): For thus saith the LORD, Ye have sold yourselves for nought; and ye shall be redeemed without money.

Isaiah 50:1 (Sin): Thus saith the LORD, Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away? or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away.

Psalms 119:25 (Word): My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy word.

Proverbs 30:5 (Word): Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him.

Romans 7:18 (Parallel theme): For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.

Matthew 5:22 (Parallel theme): But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

Matthew 5:28 (Parallel theme): But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.