



Dear Phil

GBS professor Dr. Philip Brown continues his response to a young woman's question about "unconditional eternal security" (see April issue for part one).

Dear Jenny,

In the second part of your friend's letter, he said:

There was a [Roman] law that if someone killed a person, then the law would chain that dead body to the murderer until the body finally "fell apart." I think Paul used this as an illustration when he preached in Romans 7: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24). It was as if he was (and he may have been) referring to this law in Rome. He was saying he was having to carry around this "body of death" (the old, sinful nature).

[Some say] that Paul was speaking as a lost man in Romans 7. This idea does not come from the Scriptures itself (notice all the present tense verbs, etc.). Paul never said that he was a slave to sin, but he was pointing to the fact that even though he always wants to do good after the inner man, sometimes the "old (p19)▶▶

▶▶(continued from page 4)

KENYA. "Lots of praying, planning, inoculations, and community work to raise funds preceded our departure to Kenya. The main goal was to finish the duplex for the teachers at the Kaboson Pastors' School, which houses and educates 42 students. The team put on 2200 feet of ceiling panels in the teachers' duplex...[and] also replaced the galvanized metal roof on one of the teacher's houses [and]...repaired the roofing on the school cafeteria."
—*Evangelical Advocate (CCCU).*

LATIN AMERICA. "In recent years, God has blessed The Wesleyan Church with rapid expansion across Latin America. In response, Rev. Rick West, area director, has looked to various people to help develop the growth of the area. With these experiences in mind, mission representatives from across the continent met on January 21–23, 2003, to consider ways to facilitate growth in the Caribbean and Latin American areas...Two areas, i.e., the Caribbean and the Latin American areas will be combined into one area...[and] seven regions will be created for the

Latin American Area to provide more direct leadership in the development of national church ministries..." —*Indiana South Wesleyan*

PHILIPPINES. "The Lord continues to bless the church planting ministry of David Yucaddi and the pastors of the Ebenezer Conference. Last January 30–31 we traveled to Hunduan, Ifugau, for the dedication of yet another new church. This congregation, deep in the mountains, was planted two years ago and now has 40 members (excluding children). Most of these people are, of course, new Christians, and need your constant intercessory prayer."
—*Philippine Bible Methodist Mission*

PERU. "Children! There are so many of them—in the village churches waiting for someone to come and give them colorful Bible stories, in the streets homeless and begging for a bit of bread, offering to rub your truck with a rag, or wipe your windshield for a little bit of money...The harvest of children is so plentiful in Peru that it is overwhelming."
—*Allegheny Wesleyan Methodist* ■

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the fact that the church must reach out in true love and friendship, pulling others into the inner circle of their own lives. Christians must build bridges to other human beings and offer themselves to a needy, hurting world. You can't do that without being willing to get intimately involved in someone else's life.

Isaac Watts had never heard of "Wal-Mart Theology" when he penned these words:

*Am I a soldier of the Cross,
A follower of the Lamb,*

*And shall I fear to own His cause
Or blush to speak His name?*

*Must I be carried to the skies
On flowery beds of ease,
While others fought to win the prize
And sailed through bloody seas ?*

*Sure I must fight if I would reign,
Increase my courage, Lord.
I'll bear the toil endure the pain,
Supported by Thy Word."*

No disrespect, Mr. Sam, but Isaac's got it right! ■

➔(p14) *man" wins a small battle. I see this in my own life. Sometimes I want to pray for hours on end, study my Bible for hours on end, witness to every person I see, etc., but do I always do that? No! I have two opposing natures in me. I have the Spirit of God that moves the new man to good works, but then I have the old Adamic nature (aka the flesh) that declares war against what I know to be right.*

1. Your friend is wrong. Paul does imply that he was a slave to sin.

a. In Rom. 7:14 Paul says, "I am carnal, sold under sin." The phrase "sold under sin" is a translation of a perfect tense verb. What that means is that Paul was saying, "I have been sold, and as a result I am still under sin's control." That is what the perfect tense normally means: the action was completed and its results are still on-going. So Paul begins this section with a perfect tense verb that implies that he is still under sin's control (i.e., a slave to sin). By the way, the NASB translates the phrase "sold into bondage to sin"; and the NIV translates it "sold as a slave to sin." Also, there is no variation among the Greek manuscripts regarding this phrase. This means it does not matter which Greek text you use, for they all say, "I have been sold under sin."

b. As you read through the chapter, Paul repeatedly testifies that sin is controlling him. He does the very thing he doesn't want to do, and he doesn't do what he wants to do. In verse 25, Paul concludes by saying that although he wanted to do what was right (with his mind), in reality he kept on doing what was wrong (with his body). That is not the description of a person who has been set free from sin. That is the description of a person who is still a slave to sin.

2. Your friend is right that Paul uses the present tense in Romans 7. However, with a little more training

in Greek, he would be aware that when the Greeks told a story about the past, they would often use the present tense to make the story come alive. We do it in English too. It is called "historical present," and it is used many times in the Gospels.

So in the middle of this letter to the Romans, Paul inserts the account of his awakening to the Law's true demands (7:7-13). In these verses (7-13) Paul uses past tenses to tell the opening part of his story. One day he realized that the law required more than outward conformity. The Law required inward righteousness (7:7 — "Do not covet"). When Paul tried not to covet, he found that he couldn't stop. Beginning in verse 14 he switches to the present tense to make his story more vivid and dramatic: Sin was in control of him! While it is unusual to have an autobiographical account in the middle of a theological letter, Paul includes his testimony to make a point about the total inability of man apart from God's grace to meet the demands of the law. But, as 8:3-4 says, God sent Christ, condemning sin in the flesh, so that the righteous requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us as we walk in the Spirit.

Jenny, don't let the technicalities of all this confuse you. While your friend was right that we should consider cultural factors when we interpret Scripture, culture is not the final court of appeals. Rather, the context of a passage is always the final court of appeal. The contexts of Romans 6 and 8 are unmistakably clear about the nature of a Christian's relationship to sin. Romans 6 teaches us that Christians are free from the power and control of sin. Look at 6:6, 7, 17 ("you used, to be slaves of sin"), and 22 ("you have been freed from sin"). Since that is true, Romans 7 is not Paul's personal testimony of his struggle with sin.

I know that many Christians read Romans 7 and say, "Hey, that

sounds just like me! I really have a lot of struggles with sin." But that isn't the issue. The issue is this: what did Paul mean in Romans 7? Both the context and the language of Romans 7 support the conclusion that Paul was describing his condition as an awakened sinner. He was not giving his personal testimony as a Christian.

3. Your friend is also right that he has two opposing principles within him. What you (if you haven't already) and your friend need to do is fully yield the control of the new life Christ has given you back to Him. That is what Paul is saying in Romans 6:11-13 and Romans 12:1. In simple terms, that means saying, "Father, thank you for saving me from my sins. Thank you for making me a new creature in Christ. I am so grateful for what you have done for me that I want to give my whole life back to you for your total control. I'm not going to debate issues with you any more. Whatever you want, that's what I'll do. When your Spirit speaks to me, I'll obey. Please help me to walk saying, 'Yes, Lord—yes to You at each decision point of my day.'" Hope this helps.

Your friend,
PHILIP BROWN

P.S. One last thought: If your friend says, "No sinner can say what Paul says in 7:22, "I delight in the law of God after the inner man," here's the answer: "You're wrong. Ask any good Pharisee of Paul's day if he delights in the law of God, and he would tell you, 'Of course, I delight in the law of God! Why do you think I'm a Pharisee!! We Pharisees have dedicated our lives to keeping the law!'" ■

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