

THE BIBLICAL MEANS TO FREEDOM FROM HABITUAL SIN

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Abstract
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This thesis presents the biblical witness to the phenomenon of habitual sin, of sin committed apart from conscious thought or choice. This phenomenon is defined in relation to the psychological definition of habit as an automatized response to a stimulus, and three biblical passages (Rom 7:14-25, John 8:31-36 and Matt 12:34-37) are examined in order to demonstrate the validity of this phenomenon. The concept of habitual sin is also examined in relation to its historical basis and similar phenomena throughout church history and biblical counseling. The biblical means to freedom from this particular form of sin is also set forth here, through an examination of the enacted parable of Mk 9:14-29, and the means to that freedom is a very specific form of prayer. Brief case studies are then presented in order to demonstrate both the validity and effectiveness of this method.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In Rom 7:14-25, the apostle Paul gives a description of the Christian's ongoing struggle with sin. In this passage, he describes himself as a "prisoner" of sin, doing the evil he does not want to do, and not doing the good he does want to do. This description of his bondage to sin encompasses the entire passage, concluding with Paul's description of himself as a "wretched" man, and with his crying out for deliverance.

Paul's self-portrayal in this passage presents to us a man who is captive to sin in two aspects: in both his conscious choices and decisions, and also in his unconscious reactions to people and circumstances. These unconscious responses will be referred to in this paper as habitual sins, based on the accepted psychological definition of habit as a conditioned, automatized response to a stimulus, performed apart from conscious thought or choice. Paul finds himself choosing options he does not want to choose, and responding habitually to situations and people in ways in which he does not want to respond. He cries out for rescue, and receives his deliverance from God through Jesus Christ.

It has commonly been understood by biblical counselors that the method for deliverance from conscious sin is found in the put off/ put on passages of Ephesians 4 and the set your mind passages of Romans 8 and Colossians 3, but what of its unconscious, habitual aspect? Does Scripture leave the believer hopelessly bound to respond habitually to people and circumstances in sinful and destructive ways? Does Jesus Christ not rescue the believer from this form of bondage also?

It is the assertion of this thesis that the Scripture does provide the believer with the means to deliverance from his bondage to habitual sins, from his sinful ways of responding to people and circumstances apart from conscious thought or choice, and that this means to freedom is found in a rather unexpected place: in the enacted parable of Mark 9:14-29. This means to freedom has been successfully employed by the writer, and has been taught to other believers, who have also found progressive deliverance from various different forms of these habitual sins. This particular type of sin has been observed (by both psychology and theology) to be common to all of humanity, and the freedom from it is a vital step in the progressive sanctification of the believer. This thesis will present a means through which the believer can be set free from this particular type of bondage, and may “be conformed to the image of Christ” (Rom 8:29).

This paper will not enter into the debate as to whether the idea of habit is a valid concept, but its validity will be assumed. It will also operate on the presupposition that the Bible is the primary authority in terms of defining sin, describing man’s bondage to it, as well as providing the means for freedom from its grasp. This paper will, therefore, begin with a definition of habitual sin (with habitual being used in the classic psychological sense), along with a brief examination of its acknowledgement by both the psychiatric profession and the church. It will then proceed to an examination of Rom 7:14-25, which will be demonstrated to be a description of a Christian experience, in order to demonstrate that the phenomenon of habitual sin is portrayed in this text. The paper will then examine Matt 12:34-37 and John 8:31-36 in order to further establish the fact that habitual sin is a Biblical concept.

This paper will then present the biblical prescription for freedom from habitual sins, which is found in the enacted parable of Mark 9:14-29. It will do so first by demonstrating the validity of the concept of the enacted parable, examining its characteristics and demonstrating how those characteristics are present in Mark 9:14-29. It will then demonstrate the validity of

the concepts of existential revelation and illumination, through which the Holy Spirit does not go beyond Scripture, but sheds light on what is contained within Scripture, employing it in the progressive sanctification of the believer. This paper will then examine Mark 9:14-29 as a parable (following proper hermeneutical procedures) in order to establish its central message, as well as how the relevant details of the parable relate to that message. It will then be noted precisely how and where this passage presents the means to freedom from habitual sin, and application will be made regarding how it may be appropriated by the individual believer. Case studies will then be presented in order both to demonstrate the mechanics of this procedure, as well as to demonstrate both its validity and its effectiveness. All biblical quotations will be taken from the New International Version, and all phrases appearing after an italicized Greek term will be the definition of the Greek term taken from the *Goodrick-Kohlenberger Concise Dictionary of the Greek*.

CHAPTER 2

HABITUAL SIN AND ITS RECOGNITION IN THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

The APA Dictionary of Psychology defines habit as “a well-learned behavior or automatic sequence of behaviors that is relatively situation-specific and over time has become independent of motivational or cognitive influence, that is, it is performed with little or no conscious intent.”¹ Penguin Dictionary of Psychology defines the same term as “a pattern of activity that has, through repetition, become automatized”², while defining automaticity as “the property of a process that it takes place independently of conscious control and of attention,”³ and automatism as “any act performed automatically, that is without any thought or reflection.”⁴ It is this understanding of habit which will be used to identify the type of sin dealt with in this thesis, sin performed apart from conscious thought or choice. According to Dollard and Miller, pioneers in the field of stimulus-response theory, these habits are defined as an “unconscious response to a stimulus.”⁵ It is beyond the scope of this paper to enter into an examination of any psychological theories behind this phenomenon or their validity, and humanistic psychology is by no means the way to achieve the sanctification of the believer. Psychology can be of help to the believer in the area of studying, observing, and reporting human behavior, even though it

1. Gary R. VandenBos, *APA Dictionary of Psychology*, (Wash. DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2007), 426.

2. Arthur S. Reber, *Penguin Dictionary of Psychology*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 327.

3. Ibid., 74.

4. Ibid.

5. John Dollard and Neal Miller, *Personality and Psychotherapy* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1950), 15.

is of very little help in changing it. The information mentioned here from the field of psychology is, therefore, presented only with this clearly in mind. It is presented merely to make note of the fact that psychology has observed, labeled, defined and studied the common human phenomenon of responding to people and circumstances (stimuli) apart from conscious thought or choice.

This phenomenon of habitual sin has also been recognized by others throughout the history of the Christian church, though it must first be contrasted with different phenomena which have been called by similar names, in order to avoid confusion. The first of these terms is involuntary. Though Webster's dictionary defines involuntary as an "act not done by choice or willingly," and this would be very close to the term habitual as used in this paper, that has not been the usage of this term in the history of the church. It has historically been "considered to be sin without full knowledge and consent, similar to the unintentional sin in Leviticus 4:2-3."⁶ The term involuntary sin is not used in the sense as defined by Webster's, but is used to describe sin done apart from awareness of the fact that the action chosen is wrong, but still involving conscious choice and therefore different from habitual sin. The second of these terms is unconscious. Though Webster's defines unconscious as acts "done without thought or purpose," also very similar to the term habitual as used here, this is not how this term has been used in reference to sin in the history of the church, which has generally used unconscious to describe sin of which the sinner is unaware of in the same manner as involuntary. A classic example of this usage is found in Kierkegaard, who went so far in this use of the term that he at one time saw pagans as "innocents," since they were unaware of their sin. To be fair, he later retreated from this view, insisting that "the lack of consciousness which forms the basis of the pagan's 'innocence' is itself culpable and must be seen as grounded in self-deception."⁷ A classic

6. A. Park Edwards, *Selected Essays* (New York: Garland, 1987), 27.

7. C. Stephen Evans, *Soren Kierkegaard's Christian Psychology* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1990), 88.

example of the common usage of this term is found in Clark, who contrasts conscious and unconscious sin in his work, defining the distinction between the two as awareness of the fact that it is wrong. Clark, in regard to this distinction states that, “sin comes to consciousness- that is to say, unprovoked sin becomes provoked.”⁸ The distinction between the two, for Clark, is the conscious awareness of its being wrong, so for him unconscious sin is used basically in the same manner in which the term involuntary is used by others. The third of these terms is habitual, but used in a different sense than used in this thesis. This term is used in this sense in reference to addiction, as seen in a work by David Erik Jones titled *My Struggle, Your Struggle*, which presents a means to freedom from addiction, pornography in the case of this work. While addictions, such as pornography, alcohol or drugs, could certainly be classified as “habits,” the word is used also in a different sense in this instance. Addictions at some point require a conscious choice, for instance, the addict must choose to go somewhere and buy the substance to have it available in their moment of weakness, or turn on the computer and go to a particular website. The addict can therefore separate himself from these temptations, but this cannot be done with habitual sin as used here, for these sins are performed in the everyday course of life. Habitual sins are not addictions in the classic sense, and require a different means to freedom. The fourth of these terms is besetting, which may be defined as “regular or characteristic sin.”⁹ The idea of habitual sin would fit as a type of besetting sin, in that it can be described as regular and characteristic, but this term is more broad than habitual as used here, for it would also include regular and characteristic sins which are consciously chosen. The fifth of these terms is inveterateness, a term used by John Owen in his classic work, *The Mortification of Sin*. Owen defines inveterateness as that which “grows familiar to the mind and conscience that they do not

8. Robert E. D. Clark, *Conscious and Unconscious Sin* (London: Williams and Northgate, 1934), 4.

9. Robert Elliot Fitch, “Besetting Sin,” *Religion in Life*, Aut. 1939, 516-524.

startle at it as a strange thing; yea, it will get such advantage by this means as often times to exert and put forth itself without having any notice taken of it at all.”¹⁰ This term by Owen is very similar to habitual as used here, for it captures the idea of action without conscious thought or choice, showing that Owen also recognized this phenomenon (more to come about that later). The term inveterate, however, is rather archaic, and would not be readily understood in our time, so the term habitual will be used here. Owen also, while identifying the concept of habitual sin, provides no specific means to freedom from it, stating only that “when the distemper complained of seems to be rooted in the natural temper and constitution, an endeavor is to be used to give check in the way of God to the natural root of that distemper.”¹¹ This is accomplished through “fasting, watching and the like.”¹² Owen, therefore, identifies the problem, without providing a specific means to its solution.

The phenomenon of habitual sin has been observed by others, in addition to Owen, in the history of the church. The medieval scholastics, particularly Aquinas, Duns Scotus and William of Ockham, refer in their works to the term *habitus*. This term is defined by Webster’s as “a behavioral manifestation of the essential nature of a thing or person.” To Aquinas, *habitus* “connotes the generally repeated acts through which our good-seeking character is shaped, and becomes ‘strengthened’ and properly or improperly oriented, for good or ill.”¹³ This *habitus* acts as the “means whereby dispositions to act in certain ways are formed,”¹⁴ showing the

10. Kelly M. Kavic and Justin Taylor, *Overcoming Sin and Temptation* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2006), 90.

11. *Ibid.*, 108.

12. *Ibid.*

13. Peter Hampson, *Habitus: Toward a Worked Example in Theology-Psychology Dialogue* (Wheaton, Ill.: Society for Christian Psychology), Nov 22, 2009; available from http://christianpsych.org/wp_scp/2009/11/22; Internet; accessed 12 February 2012.

14. *Ibid.*, 90.

recognition by the Scholastics of the phenomenon of habit, the formation of a disposition by the repetition of responses and reactions to people and circumstances. In reference to the relevance of habitus to modern Christian psychology, Hampson states:

Habitus is a concept we have lost or at least reduced in value over the years. But the linking of character, mind, emotion and morality in a theophanic universe is worth exploring, and its theoretical possibilities translated into empirical consequences.¹⁵

The concept of habitual sin has also been recognized by those in the biblical counseling movement, particularly in the area of nouthetic counseling. The pioneer in this area is Jay Adams, and he recognizes the concept of habitual sin in his book, *Competent to Counsel*. Adams touches upon the issue of habitual sin in his concept of the “preconditioning problem,” which he refers to as “the habitual response pattern.”¹⁶ He states that the preconditioning problem is “really a kind of computer problem. The client has programmed himself by his past activity to act in certain ways in response to given stimuli.”¹⁷ The concept here seems to be that the repetition of conscious choices made over and over in response to a stimulus cause those responses to become unconscious, as Adams states elsewhere, in regard to the term *phusis* (nature in the Greek):

use of *phusis* in responding to life determines personality. These response patterns become deeply ingrained. Over time they may seem to be as given as the original *phusis*. These patterns may be changed. God’s word changes people, changes their thinking, decisions, behavior.¹⁸

Adams may, therefore, be added to the list of those throughout the history of the church who have observed and made mention of the phenomenon of habitual sin.

15. Ibid.

16. Jay Adams, *Competent to Counsel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 148.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid., 75.

Having noted that the phenomenon of habitual sin has been observed and discussed by both the fields of psychology and theology, this paper will now turn to an examination of those in the history of the church who have observed and made mention of this phenomenon being portrayed in Rom 7:14-25. Space limitations prevent an exhaustive study of everything ever written on Romans 7, so a sampling will be mentioned, merely to establish the fact that those who have studied Rom 7:14-25 over the course of church history have also seen and mentioned the fact that habitual sin is portrayed in this text.

The first commentator to be noted is John Owen. In *The Mortification of Sin*, Owen says, in regard to sin, “I might manifest fully, from that description we have of it (Romans 7), how it will darken the mind, extinguish convictions, dethrone reason, interrupt the power and influence of any considerations that may be brought to hamper it, and break through all into a flame.”¹⁹ Of a sinful, depraved habit Owen says, “it differs from all natural or moral habits whatever, as in many other things so in this, that whereas they incline the soul gently and suitably to itself, sinful habits impel with violence and impetuosity.”²⁰ Owen’s work *The Nature, Power, Deceit and Prevalency of Indwelling Sin* is an examination of sin in Rom 7: 14-25, in which he states of Rom 7:25:

I know of no greater burden in the life of the believer than these involuntary surprises of the soul; involuntary, I say, as to the actual consent of the will, but not so in respect of that corruption which is in the will, and is the principle of them. And it is in respect unto these that the apostle makes his complaint (Rom7:25).²¹

The second commentator to be noted is James Dunn, in his commentary on Romans. Of Rom 7:17 Dunn comments, “The ambivalence of the imagery reflects the ambivalence of the experience of sin- always as a power exercising great compulsion on the individual, but

19. Kavic, 74.

20. Ibid., 73.

21. Ibid., 274.

sometimes more easily conceptualized as a force bearing upon one from without, at others a force rising up from within (psychological addiction of ingrained habit).”²² Of Rom 7:15, Dunn comments: “I (Paul) do it in blind obedience. Sin is so imperious a taskmaster that he does not allow me time to think what I am doing.”²³ Of Rom 7:21, Dunn comments:

The law as I encounter it in the reality of the situation just described is that evil has a stronger say in my actions, willing alone is not enough; I am still unable to translate what the law defines as good into practice. The reason is that the law properly understood informs the willing but does not enable the doing.²⁴

One can see in these comments Dunn’s recognition of a description here of a man acting apart from conscious thought or choice, of a man acting without “thinking what I am doing” and compelled by a “psychological addiction of ingrained habit.”

The next commentator to be examined is Leon Morris. Of Rom 7:15, Morris comments: “slavery helps him bring out what is involved. He is not completely free, and the sin he commits shows that he is in some sense a slave. He finds sin too powerful and too much in control to resist at all times.”²⁵ Of Rom 7:21, Morris comments:

Throughout this passage Paul has in mind the compulsion to do evil, and that will be his meaning also when he speaks of the law he has now found (Hodge speaks of a controlling principle, and SH of the coercion of the will). His nature, so to speak, obeys this law. I find puts this as a discovery. It is not something that Paul lays down as his presupposition, but a conclusion he has reached from a study of the facts.²⁶

Of Rom 7:23, Morris comments: “Law will be used in the sense of principle or rule of action, though with the nuance that there is some element of compulsion (he is made prisoner).”²⁷ It can

22. James D. G. Dunn, “Romans 1-8,” in *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 38a, ed. Bruce M. Metzger (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 390.

23. *Ibid.*, 389.

24. *Ibid.*, 393.

25. Leon Morris, “Romans,” in *Pillar New Testament Commentary*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 292.

26. *Ibid.*, 294.

27. *Ibid.*, 295.

also be seen from the above comments that Morris also recognizes in this passage a “compulsion, controlling principle and coercion of the will,” that he recognizes here a man compelled to act apart from conscious thought or choice. Morris also references others who have also observed this phenomenon in the text. The first of these is Hodge, who speaks of the compulsion to do evil as a “controlling principle,”²⁸ a principle which controls Paul and compels him to act apart from what he has consciously chosen to do. The second are Sanday and Headlam, who speak of the same compulsion as a “coercion of the will,”²⁹ a principle which coerces Paul into acting apart from what he has consciously chosen to do. The third is Maurer, who speaks on the use of *prasso* (to do) in Rom 7:19 as, “Life is lived...in the stupid doing of the evil which is not willed.”³⁰ Again, it can be seen here that Maurer observes and makes note of the fact that this passage describes a man who acts apart from conscious thought (stupid) or choice (not willed). The fourth is Kasemann, who comments in reference to Rom 7:15 that “we constantly show ourselves to be the captives of our own arrogance, passions, caprice and stupidity.”³¹ Through the use of the terms passions, to represent actions done without conscious choice, and stupidity, to represent actions done without conscious thought, Kasemann also demonstrates his observation of the phenomenon of a man acting apart from conscious thought or choice in this passage.

The next commentator to be examined is Everett F. Harrison, who comments in regard to Rom 7:15 that:

The slavery extends to the totality of his being. It numbs him and blinds him, for he confesses he does not know what he is doing. It is a graphic picture of many an action carried out by a slave, going through the motions under the authority and direction of a

28. Ibid., 294.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid., 294.

31. Ibid., 292.

master. If there appears to be obedience, it is not really a matter of volition, but something almost mechanical. Paul's figure of slavery is cogent here, since he is forced to carry out what he does not want to do, what he really hates, whereas what he would like to do never seems to materialize.³²

Harrison also comments, of verses 14-20, that "If there appears to be obedience it is really not a matter of volition, but something almost mechanical."³³ The next commentator to be examined is Donald Barnhouse, who comments in reference to Rom 7:15-24:

No watchfulness can hinder, no faithfulness can avoid the workings of sin discussed in this passage. Sin within us brings consequences we can no more evade than the idiot can change his look of idiocy. The transgression of our first parents brought upon us not only the imputed guilt of that transgression but gave us a depraved nature. Certain effects of that depravity are beyond our control; this passage treats such effects, not transgressions which the believer by watchfulness could avoid. Any manifestation of evil of which we can truthfully say, so then it is no more I, characterizes the deeds referred to in this passage.³⁴

It can also be seen from this comment how Barnhouse recognizes a man who does things beyond his conscious control, which no amount of conscious watchfulness could avoid, a man acting apart from conscious thought or choice.

The last commentator to be examined is Jay Adams, who sees Rom 7:14-25 as portraying "deeply ingrained habits of the past, programmed into the nervous system and manifested in the body (vss. 23, 24)."³⁵ Adams also sees in this passage a man who responds as if programmed like a computer, automatically responding in certain ways to life. It can therefore be seen, from the above examples, how commentators throughout the history of biblical studies have also observed and noted the phenomenon of habitual sin being portrayed in Rom 7:14-25.

32. Everett F. Harrison, "Romans," in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 82.

33. Ibid.

34. Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Romans*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 3:243.

35. Jay Adams, *Competent to Counsel*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 134.

Chapter 3

AN EXAMINATION OF ROMANS 7:15-25

Having demonstrated the fact that the phenomenon of people responding to other people and circumstances apart from conscious thought or choice has been observed and mentioned by the fields of psychology, theology and biblical studies, this paper will now turn to an examination of Rom 7:15-25, in order to demonstrate the fact that the phenomenon of habitual sin is portrayed in this passage. This demonstration will begin with an examination of the arguments, both for and against, the assertion that this passage describes a Christian experience. It is the contention of this thesis that freedom from habitual sin is a vital component in the process of sanctification, and this passage must needs be shown to be describing a Christian experience, for only a Christian will desire to find freedom from any and all sin.

Several arguments have been put forth asserting the fact that this passage is describing a Christian experience. These arguments are presented in Morris' commentary on Romans, and will be summarized here. The first of these is that the use of the present tense throughout the passage makes it most likely Paul is referring to himself at the time the letter was written, and Paul is obviously a Christian at the time of the composition of this letter. The second of these is that Paul presents his description of an unbeliever in Rom 1:18-3:20, and the image presented there is much different than the one presented in Rom 7:14-25. The third of these is that Paul's view of himself before conversion, as seen in Gal 1:13-14 and Phil 3:6, is very different than seen here. Paul has a very positive view of himself in these obviously pre-conversion references, in obvious contrast to the "wretched" man seen in Romans 7. The fourth of these is seen in the

theme of Romans chapters 5-8, which focus on the Christian life, making a description of an unbeliever outside the flow of the argument of this section of Romans. The fifth of these is that the will is directed toward obedience to God, which Paul himself states is not true of unbelievers in Rom 3:9, of whom Paul states there is “no one who seeks God.” The sixth of these is that Paul would not describe an unbeliever as a “slave to God’s law,” for there is no desire in the unbeliever to become a slave to the law of God (cf. Rom 3:12). The seventh of these is that the conflict taking place in Paul is a uniquely Christian experience, described also in Galatians 5 in reference to the fruit of the Spirit, which can only be produced by the Holy Spirit, who resides only in believers. The eighth of these is the reference in 7:25 to a wretched man, which can hardly describe an unbeliever, who would not be wretched over living in disobedience to God.

Arguments have also been presented in favor of the view that this passage describes a non-Christian experience. The first of these is that sin is not defeated here, but the teaching of the New Testament is that no Christian will ever be completely free of sin in this life, not even Paul, who, in a letter written shortly before his death, referred to himself as the chief of sinners (cf. 1Tim 1:15). The second of these is that the Christian life is a life of peace, not conflict, but Galatians 5, an obvious reference to the Christian life, describes the inner conflict within the Christian. The third of these is that there is no mention of the Holy Spirit in this passage, but this is an argument from silence, and therefore inherently weak. The fourth is the statement that “nothing good lives in me,” and the Holy Spirit lives in the believer. This argument fails to note the entirety of the verse and its place in the flow of Paul’s argument, for he himself qualifies this statement, following up with the explanatory note “that is, in my flesh,” this explanation clarifying the fact that Paul is referring here to the struggle of the believer with his own flesh, which is where nothing good lives. The fifth of these is that one who is a believer has already

been rescued by Christ, but this fails to take into account the already/not yet aspect of sanctification. The believer has been rescued from sin, and will continue to be in need of rescue from sin until he is taken into glory. The sixth of these is that the natural understanding of this is that it is the view of the unregenerate as seen by the regenerate, but the really natural understanding is that it is the believer describing his struggle with sin and his desire to be free from it, and no regenerate person would see an unregenerate person as possessing this desire. The seventh of these is that the now of Rom 8:1 marks a contrast with Chapter 7, and therefore Chapter 7 speaks of the unregenerate, since Chapter 8 is written of the regenerate. This argument is very weak, for the use of now here does not necessarily mark a contrast, but may just as likely be used to denote a continuation of the thought of Romans 7.

Having examined the arguments on both sides of this issue, it is the conclusion of the writer that the evidence for this passage as describing a Christian experience is by far the stronger of the two, and that this passage is in fact describing Paul in his post-conversion state. Morris puts it well when he states:

But with every respect to those who take the opposite opinion, I do not see how it can be denied that what Paul says refers to the regenerate. This is not the whole story: Rom 7 leads right into Rom 8. But it is part of the story and an important part. Paul is not talking here about the whole of his experience but what happens when the believer sins. It is not true to Christian life to say, this cannot be the experience of the believer, which is found rather in Chapter 8. For surely this is the experience of the believer. No believer is completely sinless. He is still a sinner no matter how much out of character his sin is. What happens when he does sin? He feels dreadful about it.¹

Having examined the evidence and concluded that Rom 7:14-25 describes a Christian experience, this paper will now present an examination of this passage, in order to demonstrate the presence of the phenomenon of habitual sin portrayed therein. Textual issues will be dealt with in the examination of said verses, and the NIV translation will be used in this thesis. As to

1. Leon Morris, "Romans," in *Pillar New Testament Commentary*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 287.

introductory matters (which will be addressed briefly), the Epistle to the Romans was written by the Apostle Paul in approximately 57 AD, most likely from Corinth during his third missionary journey. His audience was the church in Rome, composed of both Jewish and Gentile Christians, likely not faced with much persecution from without (for there is no mention of persecution in the letter, as in the letters to Corinth and Thessalonica), but facing strife and divisions from within (cf. Rom 14:1-15:13). The nature of the letter is that of a tractate, a theological argument or series of arguments, which presents probably the most complete exposition of Paul's gospel.²

The epistle to the Romans can be divided into three sections: the first being a doctrinal presentation of the gospel in Ch. 1-8, the second being an excursus regarding Israel and the gospel in Ch. 9-11 and the third being an exhortation to obedience to doctrine in Ch. 12-16. The passage in question falls within the first of these sections, which can be further divided into three sections: first the evidence for need of righteousness (1:1-3:20), second the divine method of providing righteousness (3:21-5:21) and third the application of righteousness to the individual life (6:1-8:39).³ Within the flow of the third section listed here (6:1-8:39), the passage to be examined follows after Paul's explanation of the believers death to sin and vivification to righteousness (6:1-6:23), and is part of Paul's explanation of the fact that even though the believer has died to sin in theory, he still struggles with it greatly in practice. Chapter 8 then goes on to present a means to freedom from the sin with which the believer is struggling. This passage forms the third section of chapter seven of Romans, following after Paul's use of the illustration of marriage to explain the believer's freedom from the law in 7:1-6, and Paul's explanation of his bondage to sin before salvation in 7:7-13. The transition from his pre-

2. D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 393-404.

3. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downer's Grove Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 427-31.

salvation bondage to his post-salvation struggles is marked by the switch from past tense to the use of the present tense which begins in verse 14.

This paper will now present a verse-by-verse examination of Rom 7:15-25, in order to demonstrate the phenomenon of habitual sin in this passage. Verse 15 reads: “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.” These two sentences can be taken as separate statements: 1) the first seven words 2) the remainder of the verse, as can be seen in the NIV translation, and also the Greek text. The first sentence is an independent statement and should be kept separate from the second statement, for they express similar but not identical thoughts. In the first sentence of this verse, Paul makes a simple statement of fact, as expressed by the use of the indicative mood, and that fact is that he does not understand what he does. Understand here is *ginosko*, to come to know, and its use here expresses the idea that Paul has not “come to know” what he does, that he is aware of what he is doing but is not aware of just why he is doing it. Do here is *katergazomai* (here in the present indicative deponent form), literally “to work out.” Paul here does not understand why things “work out” the way in which they do in his life. The “for” in the second sentence connects it to the first, for in it Paul elaborates more fully upon the meaning of the statement in the first sentence. He begins this sentence with the phrase, “For what I want to do I do not do,” and the question which must immediately be answered in this phrase is: How is the word *thelo* (translated want in NIV) used in this passage? According to *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, the semantic range of this term can include the following: to be ready, to like, to want, to wish, to be about to do something, to intend. “The word also expresses resolve as a free or weighed decision, sometimes with the idea of choice or preference and religiously with the nuance of resolute willingness.”⁴ Precisely where in this range the use of the term falls must be

4. K. Schmidt, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 319.

determined by its context and this is its first appearance in the passage. It is used here in contrast with the word *miseo*, translated in the NIV as “to hate.” This same term is used by Jesus in Matt 6:24 and Luke 16:13, contrasted there with love and expressing the “thought of preferring one master to the other.”⁵ In both of these contrasts one can see the idea of preference of one option over another, of a free or weighed decision expressed in a resolute willingness to act on the basis of said decision. Paul had made a free decision to live according to God’s law, and he expresses repeatedly his resolute willingness to do so through the use of the word *thelo* in this passage. Paul is thus described as a man who knows what the law of God requires, has decided he would like to live according to that law, and has developed a resolute willingness to do so. In spite of all of the above, Paul still finds himself acting in contradiction with his *thelo*, not acting in accord with his resolute willingness to live by the law of God, but in fact doing the very opposite of what he has willingly resolved to do. In this verse Paul gives expression to his perplexity regarding this situation. He has made a conscious “resolution” to obey the law in general, but finds himself living apart from it in spite of this conscious choice to live under it. As Lightfoot states of this verse: “I do it in blind obedience. Sin is so imperious a task-master that he does not allow me time to think what I am doing,”⁶ capturing the phenomenon of acting apart from conscious thought expressed in this verse.

In verse 16, which reads: “And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good,” Paul elaborates further on the thought of verse 15, using the “and” (*de*) to connect the verses. In the first clause he repeats the thought of verse 15, that he does what he does not want to do, that he acts in opposition to his *thelo*. The “if” here is *ei*+indicative, a first class conditional statement, a statement assumed to be true. Paul here again acknowledges the fact

5. Ibid., 598.

6. James Dunn, “Romans,” in *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 38a, ed. Bruce M. Metzger (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 389.

that he does not live as the law requires, but then mentions the fact that this is not due to any disagreement with the law. The law is from God, and Paul agrees wholeheartedly with the assertion that God defines what is right and wrong, and Paul does not disagree with God's proclamations of right and wrong. Agree here is *sympheimi*, to agree with, here in the present active indicative, which stresses the continual nature of Paul's agreement that the law is good. Paul never fails to live up to the law due to a basic disagreement with it; this is not where his problem lies. His problem lies not in ignorance of the law or in disagreement with the nature of its precepts, so he therefore must find the source of his problem in another place.

In verse 17, which reads: "As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me," Paul now makes mention as to exactly what the source of his problem is. The phrase translated "As it is" here is *de nuni*, literally "and now." The *de* here serving the same purpose as in verse 16, with Paul further developing the thought of those two verses here, continuing his search for the source of his bondage to sin described in verse 14. Paul, in this verse, begins a description of his bondage to sin by stating it is no longer "I" who do it. He has expressed his conscious choice to live according to the law, as well as his willing resoluteness to do so, but finds himself living in opposition to his conscious choice and resolve. He now concludes that he must not be working alone; there is another "actor" at work. Something more powerful than "I" must be somehow causing Paul to act in opposition to his *thelo*, and this other actor is identified here in verse 17. That other actor is here identified as sin, *hamartia* in the Greek. *Hamartia* here is a noun in the nominative case, used in this participial phrase as the subject of the present active participle *oikousia* (living), which is defined as "to dwell or reside." Sin is pictured here by Paul as an unwelcome guest, one which has taken up residence in his house against his wishes and refuses to leave. By using the noun in this manner, Paul here personifies sin, portraying sin here not as himself, but as a person distinct from himself, doing through him things he does not

want (*thelo*) to do, and somehow keeping him from doing things he does want to do. One can detect here an element of possession, which Dunn sees here also, stating, “on *oiken en* see further 8:9; here too one can speak of a kind of possession.”⁷ It can be noted here that sin here is portrayed in a manner similar to demon possession, taking hold of Paul and causing him to do things he does not want to do, both in and apart from conscious thought or choice. Do we, then, see Paul attempting to absolve himself of responsibility for his actions by postulating this distinct person called sin? The answer must be no, for he has just taken that responsibility in verses 15 and 16, and Paul does not absolve himself of his works in verse 17, but states that he has a “co-worker,” that he is not working alone. Both Paul and sin are pictured in this passage as doing what Paul does not want, sin being here portrayed as stronger than Paul and causing him to act in opposition to his *thelo*. This is not, therefore, pictured here as a cooperative effort, for Paul clearly testifies that he does not want to do it. Is this then a picture of involuntary sin, of sin committed apart from conscious awareness that it is wrong? Is Paul deceived into thinking it is right? This cannot be the case, for Paul knows what the law is and agrees that it is good, and also knows that living apart from it is wrong. What is being portrayed here is a person, distinct from Paul but somehow “in” him, taking a kind of possession of him and causing him to do things he knows he should not do and has consciously decided he does not want to do. Included in this idea of possession here is also the phenomenon of habitual sin, of Paul acting here apart from conscious thought, of sin “being so imperious a taskmaster that he does not allow me time to think,”⁸ and also of Paul acting apart from conscious choice, of sin “always as a power exercising great compulsion on the individual, but sometimes more easily conceptualized as a

7. Ibid., 390.

8. Ibid., 389.

force bearing upon one from without, at others as a force rising up from within (psychological addiction of ingrained habit).”⁹

It is in verse 18 in which we encounter our first manuscript issue within the passage at hand. The Alexandrian text primarily reads *ou*, while the Western primarily reads *ou eurisko*, and the Byzantine primarily reads *ou ginosko*. All of these versions appear at the end of the verse in the Greek texts, and this issue makes no real difference concerning the matter at hand. The variant readings would only change the end of the verse to read: “cannot carry out the good I recognize” (Western), or “cannot carry out the good I know” (Byzantine). Neither of these alternatives alters the meaning at all in light of this thesis. Verse 18 reads in the NIV as follows: “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.” With the use of *gar* here (omitted in the NIV translation), Paul continues in this verse his line of thought from the preceding three verses, endeavoring to determine why he does what he does not want and does not do what he does want. He begins this verse by returning to something he “knows,” and he knows that nothing good lives in him. This may seem rather an odd statement for a believer to make, for the Holy Spirit dwells in all believers, and Paul takes immediate notice of this, for he instantly clarifies himself in the next few words, adding the parenthetical comment: “that is, in my sinful nature.” The word translated sinful nature in NIV is *sarx*, more literally translated flesh, which Spicq defines in this usage as “a source of evil, of dissolute actions, always ready to break free, like an insolent slave, rebelling and wishing to become an autonomous authority.”¹⁰ Paul has learned from experience that his flesh has no desire to do good, and in fact, wars against his desire to do good. He has found his flesh to be a very formidable foe which regularly leads to his defeat, an

9. Ibid., 390.

10. Ceslas Spicq, “sarx,” in *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, vol. 3, ed. James D. Ernest (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1994), 231-241.

enemy which he is not powerful enough to overcome, even to the point of keeping him from doing what he most strongly desires to do. Paul here separates his flesh from himself, demonstrating its nature as an alien, an unwelcome intruder settled down in his house and not willing to leave or able to be evicted. The flesh, very much like sin, is pictured here as living in Paul, as the means through which sin operates to enslave Paul, just as the Holy Spirit operates through Paul's spirit to set him free. The use of *gar* in this verse shows that Paul is giving evidence here as to why he has determined that sin is more powerful than his own will. Have here is *parakeitai*, present deponent indicative of *parakeimai*, to lie at hand or be within reach, the present tense here emphasizing the continual nature of Paul's desire to do good. Paul here continually desires the good, which is always within reach, but is not always able to reach it, not always able to live by the law which he knows and agrees is good. This inability becomes clear with the use of *de* (but), an adversative indicative of unfulfilled desire (as in "I'd like to help, but I can't). Paul here states that he wants to do good and that he is able to do good (it is within reach), but despite that desire and ability, he is just not able to "work out" the good he desires and is able to do. Work out here is *katergazesthai*, present deponent infinitive of *katergazomai* (to carry or work out). The infinitive here functions as a verbal noun, with the article in the dative case, indicating that this infinitive functions as the indirect object of the verb *parakeitai* (to have). Paul has the desire, but what he desires does not always "work out" in his life, with sin operating through his flesh being the source of his problem. Paul here portrays his dilemma: he himself has both the desire and the ability to do what is good, but sin works through his flesh to prevent him from doing that good. Paul is not here fatalistically resigning himself to a life of total bondage to sin, for he does insist throughout this passage that the good he desires is within his reach, but he continually finds himself unable to reach it.

The problem described by Paul in verse 18 does not, however, present the full extent of Paul's problem. His description of his difficulty is continued in verse 19, which reads (in NIV): "For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do- this I keep on doing." Sin living in Paul not only keeps him from doing the good he desires to do, but also causes him to do the evil he does not want to do. We can see here the pervasiveness of sin, as Paul describes here the opposite side of the coin in his two-sided dilemma. Paul not only sins in failing to do right, but also sins in actively doing wrong. The *gar* here continues the thought of verse 18, with Paul continuing his investigation, trying to get at the root of his problem, his bondage to sin. He first reiterates here his desire to do good, to live up to the precepts of the law of God. Desire here is again *thelo*, here as present active indicative. The present tense indicates the continual nature of the desire which Paul possesses to live according to the law, which he finds himself failing to do. Paul has made a conscious choice to do "the good," but somehow finds himself acting in ways which clearly do not line up with the conscious decision he has made. In spite of his conscious choice to do good and avoid evil, Paul he tells us he not only does not do the good, but actually does the evil. Both the verb "do" (*poio*) and participle "doing" (*prasso*) are present active indicative, indicating again the continual nature of this dilemma, this discrepancy between wanting and doing. Paul here reaches the climax of his description of his problem with sin, showing clearly, in verses 15-19, exactly how endemic this struggle is, how deeply rooted is his captivity, and how difficult (impossible?) it is to overcome on his own. Paul portrays himself as a man in conflict, but is this conflict with himself, is Paul a "house divided"? The fact that Paul personifies sin (verse 17) leads to the conclusion that sin is not a part of Paul, but merely dwells in him (verse 18), and the fact that he portrays sin as doing what he does not want through him (verse 17), demonstrate that Paul is not a divided "I," two Pauls in conflict within one person. Paul's conflict here is not with himself but with another, a conflict which he

clearly portrays himself as losing, for the conflict is with one stronger than he. This passage is not, therefore, a portrayal of the battle between “good Paul” and “bad Paul,” but of a battle between good Paul (who constantly desires good) and an evil power called sin, which Paul here acknowledges is stronger than he is and which he cannot overcome in his own strength.

Verse 20 presents the second manuscript issue within this passage. Some manuscripts include *ego* with the verb *thelo* (want in NIV), but the addition or omission of *ego* to the verse is irrelevant as to its meaning. In the Greek, the subject of the sentence is present in the verb, and *thelo* is first person singular, so the subject of the verb is I whether the *ego* is included or not. This verse reads in NIV as follows: “Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.” Paul has restated his problem in verse 19, and here in verse 20, offers an explanation as to why he does the evil he does not want to do, and does not do the good which he does desire to do. This can be seen in his use of *de*, properly translated now by NIV, with the conjunctive particle being used here in apposition to the preceding verse, serving to identify the source of Paul’s dilemma. If is *ei*+indicative, a first class conditional statement, which signifies an assumption of truth in the statement which follows, and therefore describing reality as Paul sees it. Paul again affirms the fact that he does the things which he does not want (a free or weighed decision). Paul had decided that he wanted to do what is right and not do what is wrong, but finds himself acting in opposition to his own free decision. How can this be, how can Paul make sense of this? His answer here is that since he does not desire or choose to do evil, something (or someone) stronger than he is causing him to act in ways in which he does not want or consciously decide to act, and Paul again identifies this power which overpowers him. This power is here identified as “sin,” *hamartia* in the Greek, and used here in the nominative singular feminine form. The verb translated do here is *katergazomai*, present deponent indicative here, and the *ego* corresponding to this verb is nominative singular,

indicating that Paul is the subject of the verb *katergazomai*, accepting responsibility for his failures. Though Paul accepts responsibility for his failures, he realizes he does not fail alone, that someone is influencing and/or compelling him to act in opposition to his own desires and his own free choice. Sin again is personified, used here in the nominative, indicating it to be an actor in the verb *katergazomai*, being the “co-author” of this action with Paul. Living here is *oikousia*, a present active participle, nominative singular feminine in form. It is used as an attributive participle, modifying the noun sin and presenting a characteristic of sin, namely that it dwells in Paul. Sin, dwelling in Paul, is causing him to fail in his stated intent to do good and avoid evil. Paul’s behavior here does not match his intentions or desires, and the reason given is that sin “dwells” in him. Sin is clearly portrayed as a power stronger than Paul, one which he desires to overcome, but is unable to, and which causes him to act in ways contrary to his desires and decisions. Paul here describes himself as a man who knows what is right and desires to do it, but is unable to in all situations. This is due to this power called sin, before which he is portrayed as unable to carry out his desires, as being held captive by this alien power within him, from which he longs to be free, again touching on the idea of a type of “possession,” of doing things against his will, due to this power which is in him and holds him captive.

Verse 21 is translated in the NIV as follows: “So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.” The word translated so here is *ara*, a particle which denotes logical inference, properly translated “consequently” or “as a result,” indicating that Paul now reaches some sort of conclusion regarding his ongoing battle with sin. Find here is *heurisko*, used here in the sense of to comprehend or recognize. In his struggle with sin Paul has now come to recognize or comprehend something, which he now relates in this verse. He refers to what he has come to recognize here as a law, *ton nomon* in the Greek, used here not in reference to any written moral code, but as a statement of a fundamental principle of the

universe, as seen in the phrases “law of gravity” or “laws of physics.” Paul is about to state for us a fundamental principle of the Christian life as it is experienced in regard to the ongoing struggle with sin. This law, stated here, will be elaborated upon in verses 22 and 23, with the use of *gar* (for), serving to connect the thought of the following verses with the verse at hand. Paul’s use of *nomos* in this sense to refer to this principle also speaks to its universality, to the fact that this principle is in effect for all Christians, in all places and at all times. This law here is defined by the statement following the word law (the phrase “at work” not being in the Greek text, but being added by the NIV translators), where NIV correctly places a colon. The first aspect of this description of this law relates to Paul’s desires, here as *toi thelonti*, the present active participle of *thelo* (to want), or in context, a free or weighed decision, a choice or preference, with the use of the present participle emphasizing the ongoing nature of both Paul’s desiring to do good, and also the ongoing nature of this law as ever-present in Christians. The idea presented here is that every time Paul wants to do good, evil is right there with him. Paul’s desire is to do good continually, but evil is just as continually present to attempt to thwart that desire and to cause him to act in opposition to it. Good here is contrasted with evil, the good referring to obedience to the law of God, and the evil to disobedience to that law, whether in doing what is wrong or failing to do what is right. The word translated “right there” here is *parakeitai*, present deponent indicative of *parakeimai*, to be at hand or within reach. This word is also used to describe good back in 7:18, indicating that neither good nor evil are impossible (out of reach) for Paul, that he can do either. Good and evil are both continually within Paul’s reach, with evil at times overcoming his desire to do good and causing him to be unable to fulfill his desire. The picture presented here by Paul is one of the Christian continually knowing, desiring and choosing to do good, but finding evil to be just as continually “at hand”; causing him to do the evil he does not will to do, and to fail to do the good he wills to do. The law here expounded by Paul, universal

to all Christians, portrays a man desiring to do good, deciding to do good, but being overpowered by one stronger than he, causing his failure to do good and his propensity to do evil. This verse continues Paul's portrayal of a man captive, unable to carry out his desires and somehow compelled to act in ways he does not desire and has freely willed not to (note again the similarity to demon possession). One finds here the portrait of a man who, both in conscious choices and unconscious responses, acts in ways he does not desire to act, and has resolved to no longer act in.

Verse 22 contains the next manuscript issue to be noted in this passage. The vast majority of manuscripts place the Greek *theou* before *nomos*, translated as "God's law." One Alexandrian manuscript adds the word *noos* after *theou*, and one manuscript omits *theou* from the verse. Due to the fact that these are the only two exceptions, and the first seems a later addition for clarification and the second likely a scribal error of omission, the inclusion of *theou* and omission of *noos* is likely the original. This verse is translated in NIV as follows: "For in my inner being I delight in God's law;" In this verse Paul further expounds upon the law he has set forth in verse 21, telling us here why he wants to do good, using *gar* (for) as an explanatory conjunction, connecting this thought to the preceding verse. *Kata* (in) is used here with the accusative, and would be translated "in accordance with." Paul's "inner being" has been transformed, he is a new creation (2Cor 5:17), and this new man delights in God's law with all of his being. Inner being here is *ton eso anthropon*, literally the inner man. Paul here is employing a Hebraic understanding of the nature of man, a dichotomist view; man consisting of two parts, inner and outer. This inner man in Hebrew is referred to as *nepes*, translated as soul in English, with the Greek *psuche* used in the Septuagint. Therefore we can understand inner man being used here by Paul as a synonym for *nepes*. The thought here is that Paul delights in the law of God with all his soul, which can be seen to consist of three elements: mind, will and emotions.

Delight is *sunedomai*, to be pleased with, delight in, approve of; here as a present deponent indicative, a statement of fact. Paul here is stating the fact that he delights in the law of God with all of his mind, will and emotions (his inner man). Law is used here not in reference to a universal principle, but to a written moral code, the Law of God as expressed in the Scriptures. Paul is pleased with and approves of God's law with all his soul: his emotions respond positively to it, his mind understands and agrees with it, his will has chosen to live according to it.

Verse 23 is translated in NIV as follows: "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 within my members." It is in verse 23 where we find the clearest expression of the phenomenon of habitual sin within this passage. The verse begins with *de* (but), here used as an adversative, contrasting the thought here with that of verse 22. Paul delights in God's law with all of his soul, and all would be well if that were the end of the story, and the use of *de* here informs us that verse 22 is not, in fact, the end of the story, but that the story continues in verse 23. Paul here is continuing his examination of the fundamental law (fundamental principle) which he postulated in verse 21. The first aspect of that law is explained in verse 22, that his inner being delights in God's law, and the second aspect of that law is put forth here, as a contrasting fundamental principle to the one presented in verse 22. The use of *heteron* here denotes this law as a different sort than the law of verse 22, where law is used as written moral code, showing the use of law here to be identical to its use in verse 21 as a fundamental principle. Paul, with his conscious inner being (soul), delights in God's law, but he finds another contradictory law at work in his "members," Greek *melesin*, which is used to refer to limbs or other parts of the body, i.e., the Hebrew conception of the outer man. "Waging war" here is *antistrateuomenon*, the present deponent participle of *antistrateuomai*, to war against.

Paul here makes use of military language to emphasize the intensity of this conflict, as well as its life or death nature. The use of the present participle here demonstrates the ongoing nature of this conflict, the portrait painted here being of an intense and continual struggle with sin. This law at work in his members is opposed by a law at work in his mind, *nous* in the Greek. *Nous* is defined by *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* as “to direct one’s mind to, perceive mentally, inner sense directed to an object, power of perception.”¹¹ This word, according to Behm, is used here as “the moral consciousness as it concretely determines will and action.”¹² The law of Paul’s moral consciousness is opposed by a contradictory law in Paul’s unconscious “members.” It can be seen rather clearly here that Paul is describing the phenomenon of habitual, automatized sin. This “sin” is in his unconscious body, and causes him to respond to situations in unconscious ways which are contradictory to the way he has chosen to respond in his moral consciousness. Paul unconsciously (with his members) responds in ways which violate his moral consciousness, ways which violate what his conscious thought would perceive as right and his conscious will has chosen to respond according to. Prisoner here is *aichmalootizonta*, the present active participle of *aichmalontizo*, literally “to capture with a spear,” to take as a prisoner of war. Paul here continues in his usage of military language to demonstrate the life or death nature of this struggle, and also the extent of his captivity. The use of the present participle here shows also the ongoing nature of Paul’s captivity. Paul keeps on being taken captive; though he continually wants to please God with his conscious choices, he not only finds himself making conscious choices in contradiction with his desires, but also finds himself reacting habitually (unconsciously) in ways which his moral consciousness does not desire and would not consciously choose. The portrait here is of a man who desires to live

11. J. Behm, “Nous,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 636.

12. Morris, 295.

according to God's law, but who discovers that a force stronger than his moral consciousness has taken him captive against his will and causes him to fail again and again to live by the law he delights in. This occurs not only in his conscious decisions, but also in his unconscious, automatized, habitual responses. The idea that this law of sin is at work "within my members" further serves to accentuate the unconscious, habitual nature of the sinful responses. Sin, working below the surface of his moral consciousness (at a level of which Paul is not consciously aware), works through his members (i.e. tongue, hands, feet, etc), those members having been "trained" by the law of sin at work in them to respond rotely in ways contrary to God's law. "At work" here is *onti*, present active participle of *eimi*, to be. The thought here is one of an ongoing existence of this law of sin in the body of Paul, continually working through his members to cause him to come short of living by the law he delights in.

Paul's portrait is now complete, and it is not a pretty picture. It is the portrait of a man who desires with all his soul to do good, but, in both his conscious choices and unconscious, habitual responses, not only fails to do good, but ends up doing evil. Paul's description of himself in this passage can be summarized as follows: Paul, in his conscious thoughts and choices, understands, approves of and desires to obey the law of God. But Paul, in his outer man, finds a law contrary to the law in his inner man. This law is called sin, and it is located in his members. This law wages war against the conscious choices Paul makes, and it is stronger than Paul's moral consciousness. This law of sin is victorious and makes Paul a prisoner of it, causing him to do things he does not consciously think about or choose to do. So we find here a description of habitual sin, of a man who responds to situations in ways in contradiction with the law he knows and has chosen to obey, of one who responds apart from conscious thought or choice in ways which contradict the law of God.

Verse 24 is translated in NIV as follows: “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” Paul has completed his description of his captivity to sin, and here he reaches a dramatic conclusion, referring to himself as “wretched.” The Greek translated wretched here is *talaiporos*, defined variously as wretched, miserable, afflicted or distressed. Paul uses this term to describe his condition as a result of his struggle with sin described in verses 15-23. This term captures the distress which Paul experiences due to his captivity to sin, as well as his realization that he is not able to free himself from said captivity. The picture here is of a man who greatly desires to do what is right, but keeps on finding himself unable to do so. Not only is he unable to do what is right, but is also unable to keep from doing what is wrong. It is of little wonder that he chooses this term to describe this condition, for it has made him miserable, afflicted and distressed. Paul’s distress arises not only from the fact of his own captivity to the sin in his members, but also from his own inability to free himself from its grasp. This wretchedness causes him to cry out for aid, for someone to come deliver him from that from which he is not able to deliver himself. The word rescue here is *pusetai* in the Greek, future deponent indicative of *rhuomai*, to rescue, save, deliver from danger. This term is also military in nature, “used to denote the act of the soldier who runs at his comrade’s cry to rescue him from the hands of the enemy.”¹³ Paul, as a prisoner of war, is crying out to another for rescue, for he is not able to rescue himself. Paul’s captivity is here portrayed as being to “this body of death,” in the Greek “*tou somatos tou thanatou*,” the body of this death or this body of death. Is Paul here looking forward to the time when he will be delivered from sin by being transformed from his present body into his glorified one, when sin will no longer dwell in his members? This is not likely, for Paul’s deliverance is in the future from his perspective, but not that far in the future! Why would Paul go into instruction in chapter 8 of Romans regarding how to be free

13. Cleon Rogers Jr. and Cleon III, “Romans,” in *Linguistic and Exegetical Keys to the Greek NT* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 329.

from sin in the area of conscious choices (mind set) in this present age, if this deliverance from sin can only come after the believer leaves behind his “body of death”? It is also reasonable to conclude that he also expects to be delivered from sin in this life, from both the conscious and habitual (unconscious) varieties. Paul is not necessarily referring to his final deliverance from sin, when he leaves this mortal body, for that will be the consummation of a process already begun in Paul, and to be in progress until the day he does leave his “body of death.” Paul is here referring to his progressive rescue from the power of sin, and his emphasis throughout this passage is not to the timing of his rescue, but to its nature. Paul is being rescued day by day (cf. Romans 8), and will be totally rescued when he leaves his mortal body, to put on the immortal (cf. 2Cor 3:18).

Verse 25 presents the final manuscript issue in this passage. It occurs in the first phrase in the verse, translated “Thanks be to God.” The verse appears in five different forms in various manuscripts. The differences are as follows: a) “but thanks be to God” (*charis de to theou*) b) “thanks be to God” (*charis to theou*) c) “thanks be to God” (*e charis tou theou*) d) “thanks be to the Lord” (*e charis kuriou*) e) “thanksgiving to God” (*eucharisto to theo*) f) “thanks be to our Lord Jesus Christ” (*charis to kurio hemon Iesou Christou*). The UBS Fourth edition Greek New Testament selects (a) above for its Greek manuscript, and since these variations in the first clause make no difference to the matter addressed in this thesis, this examination of the passage will follow option (a) above. This verse is translated in NIV as follows: “Thanks be to God- through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.” Having realized his bondage and expressed his distress over said bondage, as well as his inability to free himself from it, Paul now sounds a note of triumph, for he knows his Lord desires that he be free from sin and will not abandon him to this helpless position. Paul begins this note of triumph with *de* (but), a contrastive conjunction, for he is

about to contrast his distress of verse 24 with his assurance of hope and deliverance expressed here. Paul here gives thanks to God in spite of his distress, for he knows God is both willing and able to rescue him from his captivity. It is God who will rescue Paul, and he will do so through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is here set forth as the agent of Paul's rescue, the one through whom his deliverance will come. Jesus Christ is here referred to as Lord, emphasizing His sovereignty, that all things (even sin) are subject to Him, that no power is able to overcome Him as it is able to overcome Paul. God the Father has given all authority to Jesus Christ (Matt 28:18), and He is both willing and able to deliver His people from their captivity to the power of sin. Believers are, therefore, not left in bondage to either their conscious or habitual sin, provided they cry out to Jesus Christ for deliverance.

The second sentence in verse 25 begins with "So then," *oun ara* in the Greek. *Oun* is a particle of logical inference, and *ara* means "then," so the logical conclusion to Paul's argument is summed up in this final sentence. This summation consists of two contrasting statements connected by the adversative conjunction *de* (but). Paul here states that he is enslaved by two contrasting powers at the same time. "In his mind" here is *men to noi* in Greek, *noi* being the dative masculine singular of *nous*, mind. Mind here is used as in verse 23 to denote "moral consciousness as it determines will and action."¹⁴ Paul's moral consciousness knows God's laws, and his volition seeks to live according to them; he has recognized God's law as good and made the volitional choice to obey it. On the other hand, Paul's "flesh" is described here as just as fully "committed" to obeying the law of sin. As we learn in verse 23, it is Paul's flesh which has been triumphant in this battle, which is the root of Paul's distress (there would be no distress if the law of his mind were triumphant). Paul has made a decision with his moral consciousness to obey the law of God, but finds himself acting against this conscious choice, the flesh (his

14. Morris, 295.

subconscious habits) being stronger than his mind (moral consciousness). Paul cries out to be free from this bondage, both from consciously choosing to do what he knows he should not (or to not do what he knows he should), and from unconsciously reacting habitually to situations and people in ways he knows to be sinful and destructive, due to his “flesh.” In his cry of distress, Paul knows from whence his help will come, it will come through Jesus Christ, for He has both the desire and the power to rescue the believer from sin, from both the conscious and habitual varieties described in this passage.

It can be rather clearly seen in this passage that the picture Paul paints in his description of the believer’s struggle with sin in verses 15-23 is rather bleak and his conclusion in verse 24 even more so. It is the contention of this examination of the passage that this is part of Paul’s purpose in the writing of the letter to the Romans. He has made this portrayal one of despair, not because there is no hope for freedom, but because he understands that human beings are very prone to fall prey to pride. Any hint given that the believer is totally free from sin will cause him to feel he has no need of repentance and leave him trapped in his current state. Any hope given to the believer that he can deliver himself will likely cause the believer to feel he can free himself, and also leave him trapped in his current state. Paul’s portrayal is appropriately bleak, for he must provide an accurate description of the disease before anyone will realize that he is in need of a cure and cannot cure himself. It is only when one understands he has a problem and cannot fix it himself that he will seek help. Paul here describes the disease in verses 15-23, renders his diagnosis in verse 24, and presents the cure in verse 25, Jesus Christ. The issue as to exactly how Jesus Christ will cure this particular disease will be addressed later in this paper.

CHAPTER 4

OTHER BIBLICAL WITNESSES TO HABITUAL SIN

Rom 7:14-24 is not the only passage in the Bible in which the phenomenon of habitual sin can be observed. This chapter will examine two other passages in Scripture in which this phenomenon can be observed. The first of these is Matt 12:34-37. This passage is translated in NIV as follows:

You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that men will have to give account on the Day of Judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.

According to *UBS New Testament*, no manuscript issues are present in this particular passage. It takes place within an encounter between Jesus and the Pharisees. Jesus has just cast a demon out of a man who was blind and mute, enabling the man to be able to see and hear. The Pharisees then confront Jesus and accuse Him of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub. The verses under examination are part of Jesus response to this accusation. His basic response is that the accusation that it is by the power of Satan that Jesus casts out demons does not even make sense. Why in the world would Satan cast out one he had sent to inhabit the man in the first place? If that were his practice, his kingdom would not stand for very long. Their answer is not even logically coherent, which clearly demonstrates the fact that they had not taken the time to think about it first, for if they had they would not have responded in that way. What they say without thinking reveals what is in their hearts, hearts that very soon before this expressed a

desire to kill Jesus (Matt 12:14). It is this type of “knee-jerk” reaction which is characteristic of habitual sin, of responding to people and circumstances apart from conscious thought or choice.

Verse 34 is translated as follows: “You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.” Jesus here refers to the Pharisees as a “brood of vipers,” for vipers produce poison, showing Jesus is aware of their murderous intentions. This can also be seen as a reference to their craftiness (cf. Gen 3:1); with this being a particularly apt metaphor for those who would intend to kill Jesus just as the serpent had “killed” Adam in the Garden of Eden. The phrase translated “How can you” in NIV would be literally translated “How is it possible?,” *pos dunasthe* in the Greek, indicating that this is in fact a rhetorical question, with the obvious answer being it is not possible (see tree analogy of Matt 12:33). Just as a tree can only produce one kind of fruit, so a heart that responds without thought can only produce one kind of response. Jesus then elaborates on this principle, using *gar* (for) to preface His elaboration. He states that “out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks.” The Greek word translated overflow here is *perisseuma*, defined in this usage by *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* as, “this word, meaning excess, occurs in the NT in Matt 12:34 and Luke 6:45 for that which, abounding in the heart, comes to expression in words.”¹ The root of this word contains the idea of abound, to possess in excess, with the context here being that evil is abounding to such an extent in the hearts of the Pharisees that it “overflows” the heart and pours out of the mouth. This “overflow” naturally implies lack of intent, for the overflow “spills out” of the mouth, and no one spills on purpose, a spill is by nature unplanned. The use of this term for the words which flow out of the hearts of the Pharisees therefore captures the lack of conscious intent behind them, for they “overflow” out of

1. F. Hauck, “*perisseuma*”, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 829.

the heart. Jesus refers to these words as “careless” (*argos*), in verse 36, and the relationship between these two terms will be examined in the analysis of that verse.

Verse 35 is translated in NIV as follows: “The good man brings up good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings up evil things out of the evil stored up in him.” This verse serves as a further elaboration on verses 33 and 34. The man here and the tree of verse 33 are alike, a good man produces good fruit, and an evil man produces evil fruit. Storehouse is used here as a metaphor for the heart and a man can only bring out of his heart what is contained in it. Words that overflow out of the heart reveal its condition and contents. Heart is used here as the source of words and actions, as the fundamental cause of all types of behavior; it is the heart which causes a man to do what he does and say what he says. The heart is also the source from which the “careless” words to be mentioned in verse 36 flow (this is precisely the point made in verse 33), and just as a tree does not choose what type of fruit it will produce, the man in this case does not choose to bring out one type of work or the other, for it flows out rather automatically.

Verse 36 is translated in NIV as follows: “But I tell you that men will have to give account on the Day of Judgment for every careless word they have spoken.” The word translated “give account” is *apodidomi*, to recompense or repay. The idea expressed here being that of sin being a debt against God, which must be repaid. Every word like those of the Pharisees in Matt 12:24 will be paid for, either by Jesus or the sinner. The verse can be literally translated from the Greek as a man will be “repaid concerning his words” (*apodidomi peri autou logon*). These words are described here as “careless,” *argon* in the Greek. Chamblin says of this word:

However useless or worthless words may appear to be, they are in fact an accurate index to the condition of one’s heart.” Plummer comments: ‘Every man’s heart is a storehouse, and his words show what he keeps there. Even lightly spoken words do that,

and what is said on the spur of the moment is sometimes better evidence of a man's disposition than what he says deliberately, for the latter may be calculated hypocrisy.²

Thayer defines *argos* as, "lazy, shunning the labor which one ought to perform."³ In this instance these words are *argos* because the Pharisees do not think through what they will say but merely respond without thinking about it. Spicq states that *argos* words are those which are "ineffective or inactive."⁴ Speech may be ineffective or inactive if it is not well thought out but merely a spur of the moment response, as seen in the response of the Pharisees in this passage. Therefore, the context in which *argos* is used in this verse leads to the conclusion that *argos* here refers to words spoken which are of an unplanned and not well-thought-out nature. The Pharisees had spoken in verse 24 in a way which was obviously not thought out before being spoken. Jesus, who knows their thoughts, responds by informing them that what they have just said is not even logically coherent, that if they had given any thought to what they had said before saying it, they would not have said it in the first place. These careless words relate back to the word overflow in verse 34, these are the type of words which overflow from the heart. The chain of events linking the overflow of the heart to the *argos* words can be seen as follows :

a) Pharisees spoke out b) Jesus replied, informing them that what they said did not even make sense c) If they had taken time to think, they would not have said it d) They must not have thought before they spoke e) Evil words automatically come from an evil heart when not planned out beforehand f) What overflows from the heart comes out of the mouth g) These overflowing words are spontaneous, and not thought or planned out, they are a "knee-jerk" reaction, spoken apart from conscious thought or choice, words which "just come out" and cannot be taken back.

2. Knox J. Chamblin, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (n.p.: RTS Virtual Campus, 1993), 111.

3. Joseph H. Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1896), 72.

4. Ceslas Spicq, "Argos," in *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, vol. 1, ed. James D. Ernest (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1994), 197.

The next passage to be examined in which the phenomenon of habitual sin is portrayed or mentioned in the Bible is John 8:31-36. According to *UBS Greek New Testament*, the only manuscript issue within this passage occurs in verse 34, and said issue will be addressed within the examination of that verse. The context of this passage is that it takes place during an encounter between Jesus and the “Jews who had believed him” (exactly who this phrase refers to will be discussed in the examination of verse 31). Jesus, in John 8:12-30, is speaking to the people and is challenged by the Pharisees in regard to his claim to be the Son of God. He addresses his comments in this passage to his opposition (the Pharisees), asserting again and again that He is the Son of God, and their rejection of Him will lead to their judgment. He then addresses the “Jews who believed in him” in the passage under examination. He then, in verse 37, once again addresses those who have rejected Him, continuing in His interaction with them until the end of John 8. A discernible shift occurs in verse 37, in which Jesus addresses those who “are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word.” The preceding phrase can be readily be seen not to be a description of “Jews who had believed him,” for those who believe him do not want to kill Him and will have room for His word.

Verse 31 is translated in NIV as follows: “To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.” The word translated believed here is *pepisteukotas*, the perfect active participle of *pisteuo*, to believe or trust. The use of the perfect tense here signifies the lasting effects of a past action. These Jews had trusted in Jesus in the past and were currently trusting Him at the moment of this encounter. Jesus speaks here to those Jews who had trusted in His words and in His assertion that He was in fact the Son of God. The if here is *ean*+subjunctive, a third class conditional, which presents “a condition as uncertain of fulfillment, but still likely.”⁵ Those here spoken to have accepted His assertion that He was the

5. Ibid., 6.

Son of God, and placed their trust in Him by accepting His teaching, and they are admonished to “hold” to it, which is the condition referred to as likely, and the Greek hold here is *meinete*, aorist active subjunctive of *meno*, to remain or hold. Since the conditional element here is all but certain, and it is the holding which is in fact conditional, Jesus certainly expects them to do so, and they are therefore true believers. The if presented here is in reference to sanctification, not salvation. Those who hold to Jesus teachings (live by them), show themselves truly to be His disciples, which is the situation referred to as likely in the Greek syntax. Those who do not hold demonstrate that they never had truly accepted His teaching in the first place. The Greek *meno* here can also be translated “to remain or abide,” showing that the one who makes the teaching of Jesus the environment in which he lives is truly Jesus’ disciple.

In verse 32, Jesus explains what will occur in the lives of those who truly are His disciples. This verse is translated in NIV as follows: “Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” Those who are truly His disciples will “know” the truth, know here being *gnosesthe*, the future deponent indicative of *ginosko*, to know. The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* defines this term, in reference to its usage in Johanine writings as “denoting personal fellowship with God or Christ. The relation between Father and Son is a knowing, and so is that between Jesus and his disciples.”⁶ As can be seen in this definition, *ginosko*, particularly in Johanine writings, denotes the knowledge of intimate, personal relationship; not merely intellectual understanding and agreement with the truth, but an intimate personal relationship with the truth. The thought here is that those who hold more closely to the teaching of Jesus will “know” him more intimately than those who do not (a similar statement is made by Jesus in John 14:24). As to the exact nature of truth, as used here, the reader is presented with two options in Johanine writings: either the word of God (cf. John 17:17), or the

6. R. Bultmann, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 122.

person of Jesus (cf. John 14:6). Two considerations lead to the conclusion that this is a reference to a knowing of the person of Jesus Christ. The first is the use of the verb *ginosko* for know, with *ginosko* generally implying a personal knowledge as opposed to *oida*, which implies more of a factual knowledge. The second is the fact that all of Scripture bears witness to Jesus Christ, as Jesus himself testifies in Luke 24 and John 5:39. This truth (whether the word of God or the person of Jesus) is the agent through whom the disciples of Jesus will be made free, and verse 34 will relate exactly what it is they are to be freed from. The person of Jesus is the agent, and the word of God is the means through which those who are held captive to sin are to be set free from its bondage.

Verse 33 is translated in NIV as follows: “They answered him, ‘We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we will be set free?’” The they here who respond are obviously the ones to whom He was speaking, the “Jews who believed Him” (verse 31). Their response clearly shows that they did not fully understand what Jesus was saying, much like Jesus disciples in response to His teachings, with Jesus asking them “are you still so dull?” Those who believed Him obviously think of slavery in terms of being enslaved by other human beings. They do not see themselves as slaves, since they have never been in slavery to any other nation or people, and they therefore see no need to be set free.

Verse 34 is translated in NIV as follows: “Jesus replied, ‘I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.’” In this verse, Jesus identifies for these believers exactly what the nature of their slavery is, exactly what they are enslaved by, and what they need to be set free from it. “*Amen, amen lego humin*” is literally translated “truly, truly I say to you,” a phrase commonly used by Jesus to stress the importance of a point He was about to make, using it as a way of telling His audience to pay very close attention and take heed of what He was about to say. The phrase here translated “sins” is *poion ten hamartian*. *Poion* here is the present active

participle of *poieo*, to do or make. According to Rogers, this usage is “the substantive participle describing the trait or class of those doing the action.”⁷ The present tense here is used to capture the continual nature of the doing of sin, denoting more than just occasional sin. Sin here is *hamartia*, to miss the mark, rather than *paraptoma*, to step outside the bounds or over the line. The believer here is portrayed as one not continually stepping over the line (a deliberate, conscious act), but as one continually missing the mark (which may be intentional or unintentional). The mark to which the believer is to ascribe is holiness (cf. 1Pet 1:15), with that holiness being shown most clearly in Jesus Christ (Heb 1:3). The thought expressed here is one of the believer continually missing the mark of Christ-likeness, of one coming up short of his goal of being conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29). There can be seen here a discernible similarity between Jesus’ description of a continual missing of the mark here and Paul’s description of the same phenomenon in Romans 7, particularly in Rom 7:19 and 23. Those who continue in this state of missing the mark are described by Jesus as “slaves to sin.” The word translated here is *estin*, the present active indicative of *eimi*, to be, with the use of the present here denoting the ongoing nature of this slavery. The word translated slave here is *doulos*, of which the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* says, “They (Christians) are already *douloi* of a sort prior to conversion, i.e. *douloi* to sin and even to the law. The meaning is that they have totally lost their freedom and are dominated by these forces. Jesus by his saving work rescues them from this *douleia* in a work of liberation.”⁸ In Romans 7, Paul concludes his summary of his situation by describing himself as a prisoner in need of rescue. The word prisoner in Romans 7 is *aichmalotizonta*, the present active participle of *aichmalontizo*, to take captive as a prisoner of war. One can observe here a similarity in thought and language between the two passages, with both making reference to the idea of one who has lost his freedom, has

7. Rogers and Cleon, *Linguistic and Exegetical Keys to the Greek NT*, 203.

8. K. Rengstorff, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 185.

been taken captive by another and is now dominated by that other. This slavery here has been described by Dunn as follows:

The metaphor is expressed in its most extreme form here. This is consistent with the other most prominent metaphor in preceding sections, slavery, since defeat in battle usually resulted in prisoners of war being sold as slaves.⁹

It is also worth noting that in both cases the captor is identified as sin, and that the idea of slavery to this sin is clearly present in both passages.

Verse 35 is translated in NIV as follows: “Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever.” Jesus here differentiates between those who had believed Him (v31) and those who had not. Those who accept His teaching trust it and hold to it (make it the environment in which they live), and are here referred to as sons; as those who belong to the family *eis ton aiona*, “unto the ages,” or eternally. Those who do not accept His teaching (do not trust it or hold to it) remain slaves rather than becoming sons, and have no place in the family. Note should be made here of the use of *menei*, the present active indicative of *meno*, to remain, used here just as in verse 31. The Jews who believe Jesus remain in His teaching, becoming sons in His eternal family, and those who have not may remain in the “household,” but never become part of the family as sons, remaining outside the family as servants.

Verse 36 is translated in NIV as follows: “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” If here is *ean*+subjunctive, a third class conditional, a condition seen as uncertain of fulfillment, but still likely.¹⁰ The son here refers to Jesus as the Son of Man, as He explained in John 8:12-30. The term translated “set free” here is *eleutherosei*, the aorist active subjunctive of *eleutheroo*, to set free. Here we can take note of the confirmation of the concept presented in

9. James Dunn, “Romans,” in *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 38a, ed. Bruce M. Metzger (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 395.

10. Daniel B. Wallace, *New Testament Greek Syntax* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 6.

verse 32, that the Son is the truth, that the person of Jesus sets captives free from sin, doing so by the word of God. The word translated indeed here is *ontos*, truly or really. With this particular phrasing, Jesus presents Himself as the only source of true freedom from sin. One also should make note of the similarity between this present verse and Rom 7:25, noting the similarity in the rescuer, that Jesus is presented in both as the only one who can bring true freedom from sin.

Having examined three passages in Scripture which all portray the phenomenon of habitual sin, one can readily observe similarities among the passages. Each presents a portrayal of habitual sin, of ways of responding to people and circumstances apart from conscious thought or choice. Each also presents the believer as being a slave to sin, as a type of possession, of one who is possessed by a power stronger than he, and not able to overcome it on his own. Each also presents a common solution to the problem, with Jesus being the solution in all three cases. Each passage, therefore, has been demonstrated to be describing what is basically the same problem (habitual sin), and prescribing the same solution. The means to freedom from this problem will now be addressed.

CHAPTER 5

THE BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL SOLUTION TO HABITUAL SIN

Having examined Scripture in order to establish the existence of the phenomenon of habitual sin, as well as the bondage of the believer to it, as well as his sole hope of freedom in Jesus Christ, this paper will now present a biblical pathway to freedom from habitual sin. The bible is the word of God (John 17:3), given to us by God the Father. It is the truth through which we may be set free from sin (John 8:32), for it is inspired by God (2Tim 3:16) and the means through which God sets the believer free from his bondage to habitual sin. This deliverance requires the involvement of all the persons of the trinity, for it is the Father who shows us how to be set free, it is the Son who gives us that freedom (Rom 7:25, John 8:36, Mark 9:29), and it is the Spirit who makes that freedom a reality in our lives and provides us with the motivation and power to accomplish this deliverance (Rom 8:13, 2Thess 2:13, John 16:13, 1Cor 3:10-12).

The Bible clearly portrays man apart from Christ as being enslaved by sin, as being totally depraved, as bound up in sin and not seeking to be free from its grasp. However, when a man or woman places their faith in Christ, they become a new creation (2Cor 5:17) and are given a new heart (Heb 8:10), a heart which seeks to obey God and be free from sin. From the moment of salvation, the believer begins the lifelong process of sanctification, of being conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29, 2Cor 3:18). The believer is delivered instantly from the penalty of sin, and begins the lifelong process of deliverance from the power of sin, a process known as sanctification (Heb 10:14, 2Cor 3:18, 2Cor 4:16, 2Pet 3:18). The believer will spend the rest of his earthly life engaged in a struggle with sin (Rom 3:23, Gal 5:17, 1Tim 1:15), a process which

will not be completed fully until the believer is taken to heaven. This process includes not only deliverance from conscious sins (those committed with conscious thought and choice), but also from habitual ones (those committed apart from conscious thought or choice).

The biblical path to freedom from conscious sins is presented in passages such as Eph 4: 20-24, in which the believer is admonished to “put off” the old man and “put on” the new man. This pathway has been employed with much success in the field of biblical counseling, and is part of any path to lasting freedom from sin and a necessary component of any proposed means of the sanctification of the believer. The concepts of putting off and putting on both imply a conscious process, of consciously rejecting one option while choosing another. But what of those sins committed apart from these conscious thoughts and choices; how is one to put off the old man and put on the new in this situation? This thesis will present a biblical means to putting off the old man and putting on the new in regard to habitual sins, but must first examine briefly Romans 8, which follows contextually from Romans 7, and therefore must be shown as presenting the means for deliverance from conscious sin, and that the means for deliverance from habitual sin must be found elsewhere in Scripture.

The primary consideration in establishing the fact that Romans 8 provides the means to freedom from conscious sin lies in Paul’s usage of the Greek term *phroneo*, translated as “mind set” in NIV, throughout this passage. The key verse in this passage is Rom 8:5, translated in NIV as follows: “Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live according to the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.” This verse sets forth two options: to set the mind on the sinful nature or the Spirit, and the remainder of the passage (to verse 17) merely describes the contradictory outcomes of the two choices presented in verse 5. The choice is presented in verse 5 through the use of the verb *phronousin* (present active indicative) and its results elucidated beginning in verse six by means

of the use of the noun *phronema*, with the usage of the *ma* ending showing that this state of mind is the result of the *phroneo* of verse 5.¹ On the conscious nature of this mindset spoken of in verse 5, Dunn comments: “He wanted to make clear to his readers that the choice already made in conversion needs to be reaffirmed and renewed in the religious and ethical decisions of daily life.”² On the conscious nature of the mind of verse 6, Dunn comments:

that it is not a passive framework of thought which is in view is best indicated by Josephus, War 4.358, where *phronema eleutheriou* has the sense of ‘determination for freedom’. This indicates a ruling determination without implying that it is necessarily the only factor influencing and determining conduct.³

This thesis will now undertake a brief examination of the usage of *phroneo* and its cognates, by Paul in particular and the New Testament in general, in order to arrive at an understanding of its usage here in Romans 8. Paul uses this word ten times in places other than Romans 8. The first of these is in Rom 14:6, where it is used to describe the choice of some to set one day apart as special, in contrast to others which are not. The second of these is in 1Cor 13:11, where it is used by Paul to contrast his mature way of thinking with the immature thinking of others. The third of these is in 2 Cor 13:11, where Paul uses it in an admonition to the church to unity of thought. The fourth of these is Phil 2:2, where it is also used in an admonition to the church toward unity, in this case of love, spirit and purpose. The fifth of these is Phil 2:5, where it is used to admonish the church to be of the same mind as Christ. The sixth of these is Phil 3:15, where it is used to encourage the church to adopt the same point of view toward the priority of the eternal world. The seventh of these is in Phil 3:19, where it is used describe the viewpoint of those who live as enemies of the cross of Christ. The eighth of these is Phil 4:2, where it is

1. James Dunn, “Romans,” in *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 38a., ed. Bruce M Metzger (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 426.

2. *Ibid.*, 441.

3. *Ibid.*, 426.

used in an admonition to Eouodia and Syntyche to be one in thought in the Lord. The ninth of these is in Phil 4:10, where it is used in thanks by Paul to the church for remembering him by supplying his needs. The tenth of these is in Col 3:2, where it is used to admonish the church to choose to think about heavenly things rather than earthly things.

Non-Pauline uses of *phroneo* number only three. The first of these is Matt 16:23, where it is used by Jesus to describe Peter as having his mind set on the things of men, not the things of God. The second of these is Mark 8:33, which is Mark's version of the episode in Matt 16:23. The third of these is Acts 28:22, where it is used to ask Paul what his "views" are on the matter of his teaching of Jesus as messiah. A common theme to be found among these uses is that of the word *phroneo* being used in reference to a person being faced with two contrasting choices and choosing to "set his mind" on one of those choices. This obviously involves a conscious process of deliberating between two opposites and choosing one while rejecting the other. It can therefore be seen that, through its use throughout the New Testament, as well as through its use in the context of Romans 8, that the term *phroneo* is used in Romans 8 to refer to a conscious process, a choosing of one alternative over another, with the alternative chosen determining behavior. This chapter can therefore be seen as Paul's presentation of the means of rescue from conscious sin, from sin which comes from a conscious choice to "set the mind" on one thought (either from the Spirit or the flesh). The thought upon which the mind is set is then acted upon, and the consequences of that action are lived out in the world. We can see in Chapter 8 of Romans Paul's means to freedom from conscious sin, and it is to make the conscious choice to "set your mind" on the thought of the Spirit and reject the thought of the flesh, to put off the conscious thoughts and choices of the old man and put on the conscious thoughts and choices of the new man.

Having demonstrated that Romans 8 contains the biblical path to freedom from conscious sin, that the old man is put off and the new man put on through a conscious choice to set the mind on the things of the Spirit and not on the things of the flesh, we now turn to primary contention of this thesis. That contention is that the Bible does not provide the path to freedom from conscious sin while leaving the believer captive to habitual sin, but that the Bible also provides the means to freedom from habitual sin, and those means are found in the enacted parable of Mark 8:14-29, a story with striking similarities to Paul's autobiographical sketch in Rom 7:14-25.

The first of the similarities between the two passages can be seen in the idea of possession common to both. This idea of possession is directly stated in the Mark passage, with the boy in the story specifically described as possessed. The idea of possession, while not stated as directly as in the Markan passage, is also present in the Romans passage. This has been demonstrated in the examination of this passage in a previous chapter, particularly in verse 17, 20 and 23. Of the phrase *oiken en*, Dunn comments: "one can speak of a kind of possession."⁴ As noted previously, Paul's use of personification in regard to sin in this verse, portraying sin as one which takes him captive and causes him to do what he does not want to do, can be seen as a type of possession. This idea of a kind of possession is also repeated in verse 20 through the use of similar language. Sin in this verse is also personified, as one who causes Paul to do things he does not want to do, as one unable to carry out his own desires due to his "possession" by another; one stronger than he, from whom he desires to be free but from whom he cannot free himself. This idea of possession is also present in verse 23, with Paul describing himself as a prisoner of war, held captive by a law of sin in his members, which takes control of him and

4. Ibid., 390.

causes him to do things he knows in his mind are wrong and has decided with his will he does not want to do.

The second similarity between the passages in Romans and Mark is the similar nature and theme of the two stories. In the Romans passage, we find Paul as a captive crying out for deliverance, and calling upon Jesus to rescue him. Luke 4: 18-19 read as follows in the NIV: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” From this verse we learn one of the reasons for the coming of Jesus, to bring freedom to all who are prisoners and release to all who are oppressed. Paul, in the Romans passage, qualifies as one who is a captive and oppressed, and he cries out to Jesus to rescue him. An example of just such a rescue is given in the Mark passage, and may very well present the means to deliverance from the sin by which Paul is held captive in the Romans passage. A very similar thought can be seen in Acts 10:38, which reads as follows in NIV: “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil.” This passage also describes Jesus ministry as one of setting free all who are under the power of the devil, who works through sin and demons. Jesus here is also referred to as the one to which all must come who would be free from the powers described in both the Mark and the Romans passages, with the Mark passage as a description of a method by which Jesus accomplishes this.

The third similarity between the two passages is the similarities in the details of the stories themselves. In both one can see the common character of one whose behavior is controlled by another, who is forced to do things he does not want to do and is subject to one who would destroy him. One can also see the similarities in the fact that both are possessed by another “person” (demon in Mark, sin in Romans), can only be set free by Jesus, and come to

Him for their deliverance. The fourth similarity between the two passages is the similar nature of the two with John 8:31-36, as has been examined previously and demonstrates the phenomenon of habitual sin. Slavery is also present here, and that slavery is to sin (just as in Rom 7:14-15). In the John passage, it is the Son (Jesus Christ) who sets free all who are enslaved by sin, just as in the Romans passage only Jesus Christ can free Paul from his captivity. The idea of habitual sin is present in all three of these passages, with the John and Romans passages presenting portraits of it and the Mark passage presenting a means from deliverance from it.

The link between the above passages can be described as what is referred to as existential revelation. This concept plays an important role in both the origin of the path to freedom from habitual sin proposed in this thesis, as well as its implementation in the life of the individual believer. Existential revelation is described by Frame as follows:

As the Spirit illumines the Scriptures and writes God's word on our heart, He truly reveals God to us. The term reveal in Scripture does sometimes refer not to special revelation, nor to general revelation, but to the enlightenment of the individuals so that they actually come to know and appropriate God's truth (Matt 11:25-27; Eph 1:17). This is an important form of existential revelation.⁵

It is important to note that this type of revelation always involves the Holy Spirit illuminating the Scriptures in order that the believer may know truth, and is therefore always subject to Scripture, and there is no existential revelation apart from or going beyond Scripture understood according to proper hermeneutical procedures. This type of revelation "can be called by various names, depending on its function: inspiration (2Tim 3:16), illumination (1 Cor 2:9-12), demonstration (1Thess 1:5), revelation (Eph 1:17)."⁶ According to Frame, existential revelation is "coordinated with general revelation and special revelation in a triperspectival set."⁷

5. John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 137.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid., 350.

It has been recognized by many that revelation may take more than one form, that it may be both cognitive and personal. Nash summarizes this understanding as follows:

Note again that this (evangelical) position does not claim that all revelation must be cognitive or reducible to human language. It asserts only that some revelation is cognitive. That some revelation is personal and noncognitive and that some revelation (such as God's revelation through His mighty acts in history) is compatible with the evangelical position. Evangelicals must make it clear that they believe that revelation can be both personal and cognitive. Orthodoxy affirms that some revelation is encounter and some revelation is communication. The two modes of revelation complement each other.⁸

The method proposed in this thesis has come about in a somewhat subjective manner, but it can be affirmed that at times "he (God) also guides us subjectively, enabling us to apply Scripture to the circumstances of general revelation."⁹

God gives us guidance through the Scriptures, allowing us to see the circumstances in our lives through the lens of scripture and guiding us to apply that Scripture to those circumstances in order to become more like Christ. This is something acknowledged even in as intellectual an endeavor as reformed theology, which Frame recognizes in the following:

Reformed theology has always acknowledged the necessity of the Spirit's illumination in enabling the believer to understand the Word. But it is important that we see this illuminating work of God, not only enabling us to formulate doctrines, but also enabling us to apply Scripture to our circumstances, and to see our experiences and inner life in biblical terms.¹⁰

Revelation can be understood as knowledge received from God through His word, and that revelation may come in various forms, as has just been demonstrated. The goal of that knowledge, however, is always the same: that the believer may know God better and be conformed more and more to the likeness of Jesus Christ. Thus the purpose of theology as it

8. Ronald H. Nash, *The Word of God and the Mind of Man* (Phillipsburg NJ: P&R Publishing, 1982), 345-49.

9. Frame, 359.

10. Ibid., 360.

attempts to understand revelation is always ethical in its goal, for theology seeks “to bring the biblical message to bear in people’s lives.”¹¹

According to the preceding, the goal of revelation is to bring a change in behavior, which as Frame states is “the goal of Scripture itself (2 Tim 3:16-17).”¹² This is the nature of the knowledge provided by this thesis, and those who employ its method would be free from habitual sin. This type of revelation, which sheds light on the connection between the passages describing habitual sin and Mark 9:14-29 as the means to freedom from this type of bondage, can therefore be understood as a valid form of revelation, as a type of illumination, of God shining light on His word in order to use it to conform believers to the image of Christ. This enlightenment also has an ethical goal, for the purpose of illumination is:

to glorify Christ in the life, or to promote healthy doctrine- teaching that brings spiritual health and wholeness to the believer’s life. Illumination is not concerned merely with understanding facts but with using those facts to promote Christ likeness.¹³

It is also the contention of this thesis that the story related in Mark 9:14-29 can be understood as an enacted parable, as a miracle as parable story. An enacted parable may be defined as “a visible parable corresponding to a verbal parable. Like a verbal parable, this visible one serves to jar witnesses into serious thinking and spiritual probing.”¹⁴ The concept of the enacted parable is not a new discovery in the church, but has been present within theology for many years, as Blomberg notes:

Two turn-of-the-century authors, whose works continue to be reprinted as evangelical classics, signaled the beginning of a return to a more mediating stance. R. C. Trench ‘Perceived a unity between the miracles of Jesus, his teaching, and his person which led him to say ‘We believe the miracles for Christ’s sake, than Christ for the miracles sake’.

11. Ibid., 353.

12. Ibid.

13. Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 132.

14. Knox Chamblin, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, (n.p.: RTS Virtual Campus, 1993), 222.

A. B. Bruce, in addition, suggested ‘that the miracles of Jesus might be viewed as parables...not...that they did not happen or that an original parable had been transformed into event through the wishful thinking of the early church’, but as ‘intimations of redemption.’¹⁵

According to this concept, the miracles of Jesus are true historical stories, events which took place in history and are recorded in the Gospels, but are also parables, designed to make a central point as all parables do. This concept relies on the sovereignty of God, who is able to cause events in history to unfold exactly as he has ordained, and these events “unfold” in time and space in order to make a central point, and may therefore be interpreted as other parables are interpreted. The traditional understanding of the function of the miracle stories within the framework of the Gospels is that they serve as proof of Jesus identity as the Son of God, and while this is certainly true, it may only be a part of the full truth, for the miracle stories do much more than simply prove Jesus’ identity. Strauss puts it well:

For Jesus, the miracles are not showy demonstrations of power or even proof of his identity. They are rather manifestations of the in-breaking power of the kingdom of God, a foretaste and preview of the restoration of creation promised by God through the prophets of old, now coming to fulfillment through Jesus the Messiah.¹⁶

This thesis will now conduct an examination of the concept of miracle as parable (enacted parable), in order to demonstrate its historical and theological validity, as well as to determine how these enacted parables are to be properly interpreted. The concept to be focused upon is the fact that many similarities exist between the miracle stories and the parables in the Gospels. As Strauss notes:

Miracles have striking parallels with Jesus’ parables and function like enacted parables. As the parables reveal the mystery of the kingdom to those with ears to hear, so the miracles demonstrate the in-breaking power of the kingdom to those with eyes to see.¹⁷

15. Craig L. Blomberg, “New Testament Miracles and Higher Criticism,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 27 (1984) , 426.

16. Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 466.

17. Ibid., 464.

Many similarities have been noted between the parables and the miracle stories, the first of which is that “the parables of Jesus serve only as obscure riddles to the opponents- a phenomenon analogous to the effect miracles have upon them.”¹⁸ The second of these is that of the parallel function and content between the miracles and parables, as Blomberg notes: “the miracles and parables attributed to Jesus in the New Testament strikingly parallel each other both in their overall function in the Gospels and in many specific details in their contents.”¹⁹

The third of these is the disciples’ lack of insight into both, as Blomberg observes: “the disciples lacked insight into the miracles in a manner remarkably parallel to their confusion over Jesus’ parables.”²⁰ The fourth of these is the similarity in the intent of Jesus seen in both the miracles and parables, as Blomberg notes: “The words attached to Jesus after the two feeding miracles (Mark 8:18) hark back to the same Old Testament quotation (Isa 6:9-10) which He cited after the parable of the sower- seeing but not perceiving...hearing but not understanding,”²¹ thus reflecting the similar intent of Jesus for miracles and parables. The fifth of these is the very fact that some have contended that the miracle stories did not take place, but are in fact parables “turned into” miracle stories. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to enter the debate on this issue, but it will simply be noted here how the parallel nature of the two “has given rise to theories of parables turned into miracles.”²² The sixth of these is that both are intended to both reveal and conceal. In reference to Jesus walking on water (Mark 6:45-52), Blomberg notes:

18. B. Dale Ellenburg, “Mark’s Use of Miracle Material,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38 (1995), 180.

19. Craig L. Blomberg, “The Miracles as Parables,” in *Gospel Perspectives*, ed. David Wenham (Eugene, Or: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 6:327.

20. Ibid., 328.

21. Ibid., 329.

22. Ibid., 333.

No parallelism with any individual parable of Jesus emerges here, but the parallelism with the twin functions of parables- to reveal and to conceal- appears as strong as ever. Mark's concluding explanation indicates that some events in Jesus ministry are 'parabolic' in that they provide the key to other events.²³

The seventh of these is Jesus reply to the response of the disciples in both miracles and parables, as Blomberg notes: "even the disciples misunderstand the miracles; so as to provoke the identical type of reply from Jesus that He used when they misunderstood His parables...in each case He berates them for lacking true spiritual eyesight and hearing."²⁴ The eighth of these is the basic coherence of the two, for Blomberg notes "the most incredible miracle stories fundamental coherence with the most undeniably authentic portion of Jesus' teaching: the parables."²⁵ The ninth of these is that they both serve as vivid demonstrations of the in-breaking power of the kingdom of God, as noted by Blomberg: "Jesus' miracles not only triggered misunderstanding, but also revealed the in-breaking power of God's reign."²⁶ The tenth of these is the correspondence of both (miracle and parable) with the teaching of the kingdom, that the coming of the kingdom is clearly seen in both.²⁷ The eleventh of these is that the disciples question Jesus privately, both after the parable of the sower in Mark 4 and the exorcism story in Mark 9. The twelfth of these is the understanding that "the miracles function in Mark's world of events in the same way that the parables function in the word."²⁸

As can be seen in the preceding examination , the many similarities between the miracle stories and parables in the Gospels make a compelling argument for the principle of the enacted parable, of a historical event, "staged" by God, to not only demonstrate Jesus' true identity, but

23. Ibid., 342-43.

24. Blomberg, "New Testament Miracles and Higher Criticism," 427.

25. Ibid., 437.

26. Blomberg, "Miracles as Parables," 329.

27. Ibid., 330.

28. Ellenburg, 180.

also to tell a story and to make a point. The miracle as parable story of Mark 9:14-29 will be examined in the following chapter in order to establish its nature as an enacted parable, and also to determine its message, especially in relation to habitual sin, for it is the contention of this thesis that the means by which the Holy Spirit can deliver the believer from his bondage to habitual sin, and conform him more and more into the image of Christ, is found within this enacted parable.

CHAPTER 6

AN EXAMINATION OF MARK 9:14-29

This thesis will now present an examination of Mark 9:14-29, beginning with an analysis of its contents in relation to the characteristics of an enacted parable in order to demonstrate that it may be interpreted as one. It will then determine what the central message of this enacted parable is, then undertake a verse by verse analysis of the passage to demonstrate how the relevant details reinforce the central message and how the parable as a whole provides the means to freedom from habitual sin.

Mark 9:14-29 may be demonstrated to be understood as an enacted parable based upon two factors: its possession of the characteristics of enacted parable delineated above and its recognition as such by others. Its recognition as such by others will be addressed first. Ellenburg states (of all the miracle passages in Mark): “such emphasis given to the settings in Mark argues for the view that the miracles performed there are intended to convey a deeper, parabolic meaning.”¹ Kernaghan also notes this parabolic quality to the miracle stories in Mark: “The resurrection is not the only miracle that Mark treats as a parable, all of the other miracle stories in this gospel have a parabolic quality to them.”² Blomberg also notes this quality in the miracle stories in the gospel of Mark: “Mark’s concluding explanation indicates that some events in Jesus’ ministry are ‘parabolic’ in that they provide the key to other events.”³ Kernaghan also

1. B. Dale Ellenburg, “Mark’s Use of Miracle Material,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 176.

2. Ronald J. Kernaghan, “Mark,” in *IVP New Testament Commentary* (Downer’s Grove, Ill: IVP, 2007), 23.

3. Craig Blomberg, “Miracles as Parables” in *Gospel Perspectives* (Eugene:Wipf and Stock, 1986), 343.

notes the parabolic quality of not only the miracle stories in Mark in general, but also in regard to this story in particular:

Once again the disciples missed the point. Instead of asking about his death and resurrection, they were concerned with their impotence. They posed the question privately, in accordance with the pattern established in 4:34, treating as a parable what Jesus had said and done.⁴

There are also several characteristics to note about this story within the flow of the gospel of Mark which lead to the conclusion that this can be viewed as an enacted parable. The first of these is its similarity to the parable of the sower (Mark 4:33-34), in which Jesus also speaks to a crowd in general and later explains the meaning of what transpired to the disciples in private afterward. The second of these is its role in the portrayal of one of the major themes in the gospel of Mark, that of Jesus setting captives free. The third of these is its role in the fulfillment of Jesus stated mission of the fulfillment of Isa 61:1-2, which Jesus states He has come to fulfill in his first “sermon” in Luke 4:18.

This passage can also be shown to be interpreted as an enacted parable due to the fact that it includes many of the characteristics of an enacted parable as presented above. It appears as an obscure riddle to the disciples, who wonder why they cannot drive out the demon, which Jesus had given them authority to do. It serves a parallel function to a parable, for it is a visible demonstration of Jesus’ mission to set the captives free. The disciples’ lack of insight is obvious, as shown clearly in verse 28. It shows Jesus intent to demonstrate the in-breaking power of the kingdom of God over the kingdom of darkness. It serves to both reveal and conceal, as seen in the question posed by the disciples in verse 28 and answered by Jesus in verse 29. It contains a private explanation to the disciples afterward, as in the parable of the sower in Mark 4:34, which also serves to display its coherence with this parable. It presents clearly a teaching of the

4. Kernaghan, 178.

Kingdom of God, and it functions as a visible parable in the realm of events as a spoken parable functions in the realm of words.

This thesis will now undertake an examination of the enacted parable of Mark 9:14-29, which must begin with a determination of the central point⁵, then proceed to an examination of the relevant details as they relate to and further reinforce that central point, as well as the many parallels between the details of this story and Paul's story in Rom 7:14-25. This central point must be related to the purpose for which the parables in general and, enacted parables in particular, are presented. As Strauss says: "For Jesus, the miracles are not showy demonstrations of power or even proof of His identity. They are rather manifestations of the in-breaking power of the Kingdom of God."⁶ Blomberg sees a similar purpose, particularly in the enacted parables: "Jesus authentic miracles distinguished themselves in that they corresponded to and cohered with the fundamental message of His teaching- the announcement and depiction of the inauguration of God's reign."⁷ As for Jesus own witness of His purpose and mission, this can be seen in His quotation of Isa 61:1-2 in His first public proclamation in Luke 4:18, His intent to set free all who have been held captive. The enacted parable to be examined fits well within this general purpose, and therefore its central point can confidently be asserted as a demonstration of Jesus' power to set captives free, that all who are brought to Him will be freed from captivity.

This paper will now present an examination of Mark 9:14-29, in light of the central point noted above, in order to demonstrate its parallels with Rom 7:14-25, as well as to demonstrate how its relevant details both portray habitual sin and the biblical means to freedom from it. The literary context of this story has been examined above (an enacted parable), and its context

5. Robertson McQuilken, *Understanding and Applying the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 186-90.

6. Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 466.

7. Blomberg, 329-30.

within the flow of the Gospel of Mark is that it occurs during Jesus Galilean ministry, just after His return from the mount of transfiguration. All translations will be taken from the NIV, and manuscript issues will be addressed within the examination of the particular verse.

Verse 14 is translated as follows: “When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them.” This verse presents the first manuscript issue within the passage, with some manuscripts reading *elthontes eidon* and others reading *elthon eidon*. The difference in these versions is that the first is in the plural form and would be translated “they came,” while the second is singular and would be translated “he came.” The first of the above is preferred, since the main verb in the sentence is in a plural form, and the plural here would better agree with it. In the present verse; Jesus, James, Peter and John are returning to the other disciples from the mount of transfiguration, and they come upon the scene of the remaining disciples arguing with the teachers of the law. This argument draws a crowd of onlookers, wanting to find out what the dispute is over. The syntax here leads to the probable conclusion that the dispute has occurred because the disciples had not been able to drive out a demon from a boy who had been brought to them, and were consequently the object of scorn, mockery and ridicule by the teachers of the law, seen in the use of *syzeteo*, which contains a connotation of mockery concerning their inability.

Verse 15 is translated as follows: “As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him.” Jesus and the three disciples now return to the other nine, and come upon this dispute now taking place. As soon as the crowd sees Jesus, they are “overwhelmed with wonder,” with the Greek being *ezethanbetheson*, the aorist passive indicative of *ekthambeo*, to be astonished, amazed, awestruck. The text here does not make mention as to the reason for this reaction from the crowd, but the most likely cause of this type of reaction is the probability that Jesus, who had just come down from the mount of transfiguration,

still possessed some of the “glow” witnessed by the disciples upon that mount. It is hardly likely that other explanations for this reaction (Jesus arrived at just the right time or Jesus presence always brought wonder⁸) would better explain this response than Jesus’ “glow.” The crowd then runs to greet Jesus, drawn to Him by this glow and away from the dispute they had been enamored of.

Verse 16 is translated as follows: “What are you arguing with them about? He asked.” Jesus does not respond here to the crowd running toward Him, but focuses His attention on His disciples and their “dispute.” He poses a question to “them,” *auton* in the Greek. This is the masculine plural form of the personal pronoun, and must be translated as “them,” but it cannot be determined within the text whether Jesus is posing this question to the disciples or the teachers of the law, and for purposes of interpretation it really does not matter. The point of the verse at hand is that Jesus is trying to ascertain precisely what this dispute is about and how it may involve Him.

Verse 17 is translated as follows: “A man in the crowd answered, ‘Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech.’” Neither the disciples nor the teachers of the law answer Jesus question, but a man from among the crowd answers Jesus question. He refers to Jesus here as “teacher,” acknowledging at this point only the fact that Jesus is a *didaskale*, not messiah or son of God, just a teacher. His reply informs Jesus that he has brought “Him” (not His disciples) his son. This detail serves to show that only Jesus can truly set captives free, and this is understood instinctively. His son is described here as “possessed,” Greek *echonta*, the present active participle of *echo*, to take hold of or possess. This form is used here as a causal participle, as the reason for the action of the primary verb “to bring.” The child has been brought to Jesus because he is possessed, with *echonta* primarily

8. Walter W. Wessel, “Mark,” in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 8, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 702.

being used in the New Testament to describe possession by evil spirits.⁹ This particular spirit is described here as a mute spirit, one which robs the boy of speech, causing him not to be able to “do the good he wants to do” (in this case, to speak).

Verse 18 is translated as follows: “Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not.” The word translated seizes here is *katalabei*, the aorist active subjunctive of *katalambano*, to take. This term is a compound of the Greek *kata* and *lambano*, with the *kata* “giving the term the character of intensity or surprise,”¹⁰ with the primary idea of its use here being the intensity of the possession as well as its unforeseen character. Throws here is *thessei*, the present active indicative of *theso*, to cast to the ground. The picture painted here is clearly one of a spirit controlling the boy, causing him to do what he does not want or choose to do (foam, gnash and become rigid), and preventing him from doing what he does want to do (speak). It must be noted here the similarity between the boy in this episode and Paul as described in Rom 7:14-25, both of whom are controlled by another, causing them to do what they do not want, and to not do what they do want. This man has first brought his son to the disciples and asked them to set him free, but they are unable to do so, despite the fact that Jesus had given them authority to do that very thing (cf. Mark 6:7). This detail demonstrates for us the inability of man to free himself from this type of “possession,” that such a one must be brought to Jesus in order to be made free. This verse may be readily compared with Rom 7:24, with Paul’s wretchedness there seen as comparable to the bondage of the boy here, with neither able to be set free by themselves or other people, but both needing to come to Jesus in order to find freedom.

9. H. Hanse, “echonta,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 287.

10. Ibid., 496.

Verse 19 is translated as follows: “O unbelieving generation, Jesus replied, how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.” The opening phrase in this verse is literally “O generation without faith,” with the target of this response not being definitively known. Jesus could here be talking to the man, the disciples, the crowd, the teachers of the law, or all of the above. The question here is obviously rhetorical, with no answer required or expected. It serves here as a means to express Jesus’ consternation and indignation at the lack of faith of all the people present at this particular episode. He had given His disciples authority in just such a situation, and they had been unable to use that authority. Not wanting to leave the boy a further victim of this bondage, Jesus commands them to bring the boy to Him. Jesus is about to do what His disciples were unable to, for the disciples were willing but somehow unable, while Jesus is both willing and able.

Verse 20 is translated as follows: “So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.” The boy is then brought to Jesus to be set free from his possession. The spirit sees Jesus and immediately throws the boy into a convulsion. The word spirit is a nominative singular neuter form of the noun *pneuma*, the word saw here is *idon*, the aorist active participle of the verb *eidon* and the word throw into convulsion here is the aorist active indicative of the verb *sysparasso*. This syntax in the Greek leads to the conclusion that to convulse is the primary verb here, that saw is an adjectival participle, and that spirit is the subject of the verb to convulse. It is the spirit which throws the boy into a convulsion (he does not convulse himself), for in this type of construction the noun in the nominative case performs the action of the primary verb. The use of the Greek *euthus* here also serves to emphasize the level of control which this spirit has over this boy, along with the complete lack of resistance from that boy. The use of this term can also point to the habitual nature of this action, the boy has no time to think or choose, but

responds (under the control of another) in knee jerk fashion. This convulsion is then described, with the boy falling to the ground, rolling around and foaming at the mouth. The verb to roll around here is *ekulieto*, imperfect middle indicative of *kylio*. It serves as the primary verb in this sentence and the imperfect tense signifies the continuous nature of the action. The words fall and foam are both participles in the Greek, with fall being an aorist participle, showing the fall was prior to the rolling around, while foam is present, showing its concurrence with the rolling around. The relevance of this particular detail of the story to the phenomenon of habitual sin is that the spirit here causes the boy to act in a way which he does not desire or consciously choose. He does not want to go into convulsion (if he did he would not be coming for deliverance), nor does he consciously decide to, this spirit causes him to do so against his will. One can readily observe a similarity here between this passage and Rom 7:14-25, specifically with Rom 7:15, 17 and 19, in which Paul does what he does not desire or consciously choose to do.

Verse 21 is translated as follows: “Jesus asked the boy’s father, ‘How long has he been like this?’ ‘From childhood, he answered.” Jesus now asks the boy’s father how long he has been like this, which seems at first glance rather irrelevant as to whether he can be set free or not. The extraneous nature of this question points to the parabolic nature of the episode. Neither Matthew nor Luke make note of this question in their versions of this episode, and the fact that it is included here points to Mark’s understanding of the parabolic nature of this incident, making this question a relevant detail in the interpretation of this incident. The answer given is “from childhood,” *ek paidiothen* in the Greek. The word *ek* is used to mean from or since, translated as from here. *Paidiothen* is the adverbial form of *paidion*, with the adverb here serving to modify the verb *gegomen*, the perfect active indicative of *ginomai*, to become. The perfect tense here indicates a settled state of affairs, and the use of *ginomai* (vs. *eimi*) shows that the child was not born like this but became like this at a point in time. This response completes the information on

how long he has been like this. The boy was not born with a demon, but was possessed by the demon during early childhood, and was currently possessed by him at the time of this incident. This boy has been captive of this demon since childhood, and has been brought to Jesus to be set free.

As to the time of this possession, a brief examination of the Greek words for child will serve to narrow down this time frame. The first of these is *nepios*, meaning infant or young child; the second is *teknon*, usually referring to youth or grown children; the third is *pais*, referring to the age between *nepios* and *teknon*. The Greek used here is *paidion*, a diminutive form of *pais* (child), usually restricted to young children. This term would therefore refer to the early part of the period between infancy and youth, and would indicate a child between the ages of three and seven. This demon has held the boy captive since early childhood, beyond infancy but not yet to youth. This detail is also relevant to the parabolic interpretation of the passage; for it shows that the bondage began in childhood and has bound him his entire life. Also relevant is the fact that this shows the level of control which the spirit has always had over the boy, making him do what he does not desire or consciously choose to do. This detail is also relevant to the pericope in Romans 7 in that it demonstrates that those habitual sins which enslave us are rooted in us in childhood, and have become so automatized that we respond in ways we do not consciously choose. This demon possessing the boy also bears a remarkable similarity to the “demon” of sin living in Paul and causing him to do what he does not want or choose to do.

Verse 22 is translated as follows: “It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.” Thrown here is *eballen*, aorist active indicative of *ballo*, to throw. Its usage here is as a constative aorist, summarizing the action that had taken place often.¹¹ The use of this verb in this form serves to emphasize two things: 1) the

11. Rogers and Cleon, *Linguistic and Exegetical Keys to the Greek NT*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 87.

repeated nature of this action 2) the spirit as subject, throwing the boy into fire and water against his will. The use of *often* here emphasizes the frequency of the episodes of this throwing. Fire and water here designate things with the potential bring about the boy's destruction. The purpose of this throwing is given here as the destruction of the boy, destroy here being *apolesei*, the aorist active subjunctive of *appolumi*, to destroy. The purpose of the spirit here is the destruction of the boy, for the devil (and his underlings) comes to kill, steal and destroy (Jn. 10:10). The above details are relevant to the parabolic interpretation of the passage in that they demonstrate the repetitiveness and frequency of the possession of the boy by the spirit, along with the purpose of said possession. The frequency and repetitiveness of the boy being caused to do things against his will, along with its stated purpose of the destruction of its victim, bring to mind again Paul's description of his own "possession" in Rom 7:14-25, with its description of the frequency and repetitiveness of sin's causing Paul to do things against his will. The "but" in this verse is *alla*, used here as a strong adversative. If you can do here is *ei dunei*, with *dunei* being the present subjunctive deponent of *dunamai*, to be able. This phrase is used here as a "first class conditional clause where the condition is judged to be true."¹² Jesus is therefore here being judged as having the ability to set the boy free. The father therefore appeals to Jesus to have mercy on him and to come to their aid. The implication here is that the father knew Jesus was able to help them, and he is inquiring here not of Jesus ability to help them, but of his willingness to do so.

Verse 23 presents the first manuscript issue within the passage, and is translated as follows: "If you can?" said Jesus. Everything is possible for him who believes." The manuscript issue present here involves the first sentence in the verse, with some manuscripts adding the verb *pisteusai* after *to ei dune* (if you are able). Since Jesus here appears merely to be

12. Ibid.

repeating the man's question, the most natural reading in this case would be to omit the *pisteusai*, and it is also the simplest reading and therefore most likely the correct one. Of the phrase *to ei dune*, Rogers states: "The article has the effect of making this clause into a noun; "As to your if you can."¹³ Jesus here responds to the man's inquisition as to His willingness to set the boy free. The reply is that Jesus is able and willing to set free all who "believe." Believe here is *pisteuonti*, the present active participle of *pisteuo*, to believe, trust, have faith in. In this instance "the participle is used as a substantive, a dative of advantage."¹⁴ The dative of advantage "serves to indicate the person for whose benefit something is done."¹⁵ Jesus reply here indicates that He is both willing and able to free all those who trust in Him and come to Him for freedom. The relevant detail here is that it is trust in Jesus which makes Him willing to set free any who are held captive by the devil or any of his emissaries (cf. Acts 10:38). A similarity can also be seen here between this passage and Rom 7:14-25, for in that passage it is also Jesus Christ who is the only one who is able to rescue Paul from the bondage to habitual sin which he describes in that passage.

Verse 24 presents the next manuscript issue in the passage, and is translated as follows: "Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, 'I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!'" The manuscript issue here occurs in the phrase "the boy's father exclaimed," with some manuscripts adding the Greek *meta dakron* after this phrase, with *meta dakron* being translated as "with tears," which is a longer and more difficult reading and likely a later addition. The father here responds to Jesus immediately, "crying out" (*krazas elegen*) in a very enigmatic statement. It seems apparent the father did believe in Jesus ability and authority to set the boy free, as

13. Ibid., 87.

14. Ibid.

15. James A. Brooks and Carlton L. Winbery, *Syntax of New Testament Greek* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1979), 33.

demonstrated in the act of bringing the boy to him in the first place. Unbelief, however, seems to appear here, likely due to the failure of Jesus' disciples to be able to set the boy free, which has caused the father to doubt the willingness of Jesus to set him free, as seen in the Father's statement in verse 22 (if you can do anything). The relevant detail here is that freedom rests not in the will of the one in bondage, but in the will of the savior and the willingness of the one in bondage to come to Him.

Verse 25 is translated as follows: "When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, He rebuked the evil spirit. "You deaf and mute spirit," he said, "I command you, come out of him and never enter again." The Greek translated running is *episuntrechei*, the present active indicative of *epistrecho*, to run together. In this instance "the word describes a crowd converging on a single point, perhaps from several directions."¹⁶ Jesus does not desire to create a scene here, so He quickly casts out the spirit. The word translated rebuke here is *epitimesen*, the aorist active indicative of *epitimaō*, which "corresponds to the twofold sense of *timao*, to award honor or blame and comes into use for "to blame."¹⁷ In the usage of a term meaning to blame here, one can see Jesus rebuke here as a kind of blame. Jesus blames the demon for the boy's condition, identifying the demon as the source of his condition, as its cause. The relevance of this detail is that the boy's bondage is caused by another, which can readily be related to Paul's bondage in Romans 7, in which "sin" is the cause of Paul's bondage. Jesus then identifies the spirit as a "deaf and mute" one, speaking to a particular spirit which is causing the boy's bondage. The words deaf, mute and spirit are all in the vocative singular neuter here, with the vocative "indicating the person or thing being addressed."¹⁸ This spirit is therefore the one which can be identified as the one which makes the boy deaf and mute, as the one which is

16. Rogers and Cleon, 87.

17. E. Stauffer, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 249.

18. Brooks and Winbery, 64.

responsible for his condition. The relevant detail here is that the source of the bondage can be determined by observing the behavior of the one in bondage, which can be related to Rom 7:15-16, in which Paul's captor (sin) is identified through his behavior (sinning).

"I command you" here is *epitasso*, the present active indicative of *epitasso*, to command. Jesus here displays His authority over evil spirits, and He has also given this authority to His disciples (Mark 6:7). The relevant detail here is that Jesus has authority to free captives, just as He proclaimed in Luke 4:18. "Come out of him" here is *ezelthe*, the aorist active imperative of *exerchomai*, to come out, with the use of the imperative making this a command, literally "you come out of him." With this command, Jesus expels the spirit from within the boy, releasing him from his bondage (cf. John 8:34-36). Never enter here is *eiselthes*, the aorist active subjunctive, with the subjunctive here "used with the negative *meketi* to form a prohibition."¹⁹ The phrase never enter again here speaks to the permanence of the deliverance which Jesus provides. The relevant detail here is that Jesus has the power and the authority and the willingness to permanently set free all who are held captive by any form of evil, particularly the evil known as "sin."

Verse 26 is translated as follows: "The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said "He's dead." Shrieked here is *krazas*, the aorist active participle of *krazo*, to cry. "In the New Testament the demons cry out when Jesus expels them. They express the demonic resistance which Jesus overcomes."²⁰ The relevant detail here is that the spirit does not go willingly, that it will resist and must be forced out; there is no "easy" deliverance. This may be related to Rom 7:22, in which sin is pictured as at war within Paul, "waging war" with the law of his mind, the use of warfare there being similar

19. Rogers and Cleon, 87.

20. W. Grundmann, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 465.

in intensity to the struggle portrayed here. Convulsing here is *spazaros*, the aorist active participle of *sparasso*, to convulse or agitate greatly, used here with *polla*, meaning great in magnitude and quantity. The thought here is one of reference to the violent nature with which the spirit is cast out and finally relinquishes his hold on the boy. The relevant detail here is the level of resistance which the spirit shows, as well as the intensity of the struggle through which the boy gains his freedom. This may be compared with Rom 7:23-24, which portray the desperate nature of Paul's predicament and the level of desperation seen in his plea for freedom. Looked here is *egeneto*, aorist deponent indicative of *ginomai*, to become, to assume the character or appearance of anything. The violence with which the spirit left the boy made him take on the appearance of a corpse to the crowd, with many assuming he was dead. The relevant detail here is again the intensity of the struggle for freedom, and the toll which it takes on the one being freed, that there is no quick and easy means to freedom from this type of bondage.

Verse 27 is translated as follows: "But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up." Jesus here "taking hold of his hand," "lifted him" to his feet, with lifted here being *egeiren*, the aorist active indicative of *egeiro*, to awaken or raise up. To stand here is *aneste*, also aorist active indicative of *anistemi*, to stand up. Jesus here takes hold of his hand and either wakes him up or stands him up. It is not really possible to conclude from the text whether the boy is dead or not, but whatever his condition Jesus is able to overcome it and his deliverance is now complete, he is no longer a captive of this spirit, and never will be again. The relevant detail here is that no matter how great the bondage or how powerful the demon, Jesus is able to free the captive. It may also be noted here the similarity in language between this verse and Paul's usage of the phrase "this body of death" in Rom 7:24.

Verse 28 is translated as follows: "After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive it out"? After Jesus had gone into the house, His disciples

asked Him a question “privately,” *kat idion* in the Greek, meaning privately or aside. To ask here, is *eperoton*, the imperative active indicative of *eperotao*, here as an inceptive imperfect,²¹ which may be translated “began to ask.” Their question is as to why they were not able to drive out the demon, indicating that they possessed the willingness, but lacked the ability, which puzzled them for they had been able to do so previously (cf. Luke 10:17). The relevant detail here is that some demons are too powerful and have too strong a hold on their captives to be removed by ordinary means, much like the power of sin in Romans 7, before which Paul stands powerless to overcome.

Verse 29 is translated as follows: “He replied, ‘This kind can come out only by prayer.’” The phrase “this kind” is *touto to genos* with the word kind here referring to a certain specific type of demon, thus showing a differentiation in types of demons. Jesus here tells us that in the world of demons there are differences: “Some are more powerful and malignant than others.”²² Jesus then presents the means for casting out this most powerful type of demon, prayer. This is the “only” means by which one held captive by this most powerful of demons can be set free. Many manuscripts add the phrase *kai nesteia* (and fasting) at the end of this verse. If this is a later addition, it does not effect this thesis, if it is genuine, it may then be seen as adding the idea of self-control and perseverance to the prayer, for fasting is basically an exercise in self-control. The relevant detail in this verse is that Jesus Himself here provides the means to freedom from bondage by this most powerful type of demon, and this means is by prayer, by crying out to Jesus, which is also Paul’s means in Rom 7:25. With the noted similarities between this story and Paul’s story in Rom 7:14-25, it also becomes apparent that the means of rescue for those who come to Jesus in both stories would be the same, and that means is through prayer.

21. Rogers and Cleon, 87.

22. Kernaghan, 352.

It can be seen, from the preceding examination of Mark 9:14-29, how this enacted parable paints a picture of one controlled by another from childhood, caused to do things not consciously thought about or chosen, and held in bondage to these actions and reactions. The same phenomenon can also be ascertained in the life of Paul as described in Rom 7:14-25, with sin in this passage filling the same role as the evil spirit in the Markan passage. In both cases, one also finds the victim turning to Jesus for deliverance from this type of bondage. This phenomenon can also be attested to by Christians who truly seek to be conformed to the image of Christ, who also have been bound since childhood by sinful ways of responding to people and circumstances apart from conscious thought or choice.

In the enacted parable of Mark 9:14-29, Jesus provides the key to freedom from bondage to the type of “demon” portrayed there, and this type of “demon” is also present in the life of Paul in Romans 7 and in the lives of all believers, so the key to freedom is the same for all: prayer. This is the means which Jesus has ordained for those brought to Him to find freedom from sinful ways of behaving which have controlled them from childhood, responding to people and circumstances (apart from conscious thought or choice) in ways they do not desire and long to be free from, and so freedom must be sought in this way from “this kind” of demon, for “this kind can come out only by prayer” (Mark 9:29).

CHAPTER 7

CASE STUDIES

Having demonstrated the biblical basis for this method to freedom from habitual sin, this thesis will now present the means through which it may be implemented in the life of the believer. This will be accomplished through the presentation of case studies, examples in which this method has been successfully employed in the lives of believers and has enabled them to obtain some measure of freedom from various forms of habitual sin.

The first of these studies comes from the life of the author. The habitual sin in question might best be referred to as “girl-watching,” the common male behavior of following an attractive woman with the eyes and head as she walks by. This behavior is begun early in men, and by young adulthood it is basically automatic, done apart from conscious thought or choice, and fitting the definition of habitual sin. The author married a rather sensitive woman, who one day, as we were walking together somewhere turned to me and said “It really hurts me when you do that.” To which the response was: “Do what”? To which she replied: “When you watch other women like that.” I then made her aware of the fact that I did not do this intentionally; it was a habitual response that I had been doing without thinking for many years, and I informed her that I would stop. I then tried with all the strength I could muster to discontinue this behavior, but found that I could not, no matter how hard I tried. I then cried out to the Lord to save me from this behavior (much like Paul in Rom 7:25). The road to freedom from this came several weeks later, during a time of daily meditation upon the Scripture, when the subject was 1Thess. As I was reading through chapter 4, verses 3 and 4 literally jumped out at me, for they

read as follows: “It is God’s will that you be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen who do not know God.” These verses of Scripture speak precisely to the situation in which I found myself, and from that day forward I began a daily routine of praying this Scripture for myself in regard to this situation, and gradually found this behavior disappearing, to the point where my wife, if questioned regarding this matter, will respond that the behavior has gone.

The second issue in the life of the author has to do with the avoidance of confrontation. I grew up in an alcoholic family, in which fighting and arguing were a daily reality. I learned to deal with this confrontative environment by avoiding it, by either hiding out in my room or leaving the house and running the streets for the evening. This avoidance of confrontation became a deep-seated habit in my life, and I found myself avoiding confrontation habitually, without consciously thinking about it first or consciously choosing to do so. This issue came to the surface in the daily performance of my job responsibilities. As a manager, it is sometimes part of my job to confront associates or customers over certain issues. One night a particular incident occurred in which it was my express responsibility to confront an associate regarding their behavior, to which I responded by doing nothing about that behavior, but simply observing it and walking away in order to avoid a confrontation. In a state of guilt, I cried out to the Lord, Who proceeded to reveal to me my issue with the avoidance of confrontation. Again in daily Scripture meditation, I was reading through the Psalms, and came across Ps 94:16, which reads as follows: “Who will rise up for me against the wicked? Who will take a stand for me against evildoers?” This verse of Scripture again deals precisely with the issue I faced, and I began a daily practice of praying this verse in regard to this situation, and began to find a measure of

freedom from it, beginning to confront those who need to be confronted, whether on the job or in the carrying out of my ministerial responsibilities.

The next of these studies comes from the life of the author's spouse, who informed me of an issue she was dealing with regarding her tongue, with her habit of speaking without thinking and saying things she later regretted. This "knee-jerk" reaction caused her much consternation, and she was unable to free herself from it despite considerable effort in that respect, and she related this to the author, who had recently begun to experience deliverance from his girl-watching. I then related this means to freedom to her and advised her to study her Bible and read all verses concerning the mouth or the tongue. After several days of study, she came upon Ps 141:3, which reads: "Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips." She related to me that she felt this was "her" verse, and I advised her to begin to pray this verse daily, and she gradually found an ever greater measure of freedom from this issue.

The next of these studies to be presented occurred in the life of a close friend of the author, whose name will not be mentioned here. This person has dealt with anger issues their entire life, often responding to people and circumstances in anger in a "knee-jerk" manner, just responding angrily without consciously choosing to. After having this method explained during a class, a search was undertaken, during which Jas 1:20 was encountered. This verse reads as follows: "for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires." It was then related to the author the inclination of the subject that this was the verse to be prayed in regard to the anger issue, and a regular practice of prayer of this verse was begun. The subject (and the subject's spouse) subsequently related to the author the ever-growing experience of freedom from the bondage of responding in anger to people and circumstances.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

This thesis has demonstrated the biblical witness to the phenomenon of habitual sin, of sin committed apart from conscious thought or choice, as well as the recognition of this phenomenon by others in the history of the church and the field of biblical studies. This form of sin has enslaved every believer at various times and in varying degrees, and all who have been exposed to teaching on this phenomenon have borne witness as to its existence, as well as their own experience with it. All true believers in Christ will, like Paul in Romans 7, seek freedom from this phenomenon, and this thesis presents the biblical means for deliverance from this particular type of sin, and that deliverance is found through prayer, for only Jesus possesses the power to set the believer free from this type of sin, which can be seen as a form of “possession.” This possession has such a hold on the believer that it causes him to do things apart from conscious thought or choice, and therefore it cannot be overcome through conscious means (such as setting the mind on other things), but must be overcome by another method, by a very specific type of prayer. This prayer must first be biblical, the living word works through the written word. Second, it must be personal; it is unique to the individual and must be fit to deal with the specific situation. Third, it must be persistent, it will not bring instantaneous deliverance but deliverance will be gradual. Fourth, it must be inspired, the Holy Spirit must guide the believer into the proper Scripture regarding his situation and empower the believer to persevere in this prayer in spite of the opposition which will likely come. This method for deliverance from this type of sin has been successfully implemented by the author in his own life, and been taught to

others who have done likewise. It is my prayer that many others may put this method into practice and find similar freedom from the bondage to habitual sin which characterizes the lives of so many believers.

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