

Romans 7:15-25a^{iv}

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

^{iv} About Romans 7:15-25a

Paul is struggling with the relationship of the law of Moses to human sin. Paul sees several laws at work in the human sphere. There is first the moral law, “the law of God,” which is both natural law as known to the Gentiles and more specifically the Jewish law. This law is approved by the mind (2:14-16) but cannot grant the power to keep it; this law has right but not might. Opposed to this law is “the law of sin and of death,” which has might but not right.

Sin is personified as an external force that finds entry into human life through the frailness of flesh. In the conflict between the moral law and the law of sin, Paul recognizes the principle that “when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand.” He says that left to himself he may choose the good, but will do the evil; human nature is, both in pagan and Christian experience, at odds with itself. Only the law of the Spirit has both right and might to empower the Christian in the ongoing effort to live out the status acquired in baptism (6:11-13).