



The Reflector

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Paul's Struggle with Sin

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“For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law

of sin.” (Romans 7:14-25)

Romans 7:14-25 is often used to show the internal struggle that Paul was having against sin, as a Christian. But, is that really the case? We duly note that throughout these verses Paul uses the present tense. But, there is a linguistic device known as the *historical present*, where the present is used for things having taken place in the past: “The use of a verb phrase in the present tense to refer to an event that took place in the past. In narratives, the historical present may be used to create an effect of immediacy.” (*Grammar.about.com*)

The context points to Paul’s using the present for the past in these verses. In verse 7, after pointing out that Christians are now free from the law (of Moses) to be married to another, i.e., Christ, he raises the question “is the law sin?” He then answered with an emphatic “God forbid.” Then he begins a lengthy explanation as to how the problem was not with the law but with the Jew as he tried to serve God under the law.

He says, in verse 8, the law (of Moses) “produced in me coveting of every kind” (NASB). Then in verse 13, he asks, “Was then that which is good made death unto me?” He answers, “God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good (the law-eob).”

Then he dramatically shifts to the present tense to describe his (and by extension other Jews) struggle dealing with the problem of sin and the

difficulty of pleasing God while under the law and, in verse 24, raises a concluding question: “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” He needed deliverance from the other “law” in his members (v. 23). (This is called the “law of sin and death” in 8:2). It is highly unlikely that he would described himself as a Christian as being “wretched.” After raising this question he answered it, “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord (v. 25)

The subject continues into Chapter 8 by saying, “There is therefore **now** no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (8:1). “**Now**” as opposed **then** – when they were under the law (of Moses). “Therefore” is referring to what is said before in chapter 7. He then discussed the condition of the Christian under the law of Christ. “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” (8:2-4).

There are 3 laws in these verses:

1. “The law of the Spirit of life.” – Same as “The law of Christ” or “Law of Liberty”
2. “The law of sin and death.” – The law referred to in 7:23.
3. “The law” – Of Moses.

The law of the Spirit of life has now done what “the law” (of Moses) could not do – it has freed us from the “law of sin and death” i.e., the domination and condemnation of sin. ■

Sophistry

Philip North

The subject under consideration is defined by Webster’s Dictionary to simply mean, “(1) deceptively subtle reasoning or argumentation. (2) **Sophism.**” The definition of sophism will shed

additional light on sophistry. The word is defined as, “(1) an argument apparently correct in form, but actually invalid, ...such as an argument used to deceive. (2) **Sophistry.**”

From these definitions, we may for sure illustrate sophistry in two words, which would be, “smooth talking!” In turn, there are a number of words very much synonymous with smooth talking: Deceit, guile, lying, trickery, manipulation, flattery, and connivery. Then, take note of various phrases that fit smooth talking: Silver tongued, eloquent arguing, seductive reasoning, alluring speech, and deceptive persuasion. While some of the aforementioned words and phrases are not always referred to in a negative way, such is definitely the case when sophistry enters into the picture.

Sophistry then, obviously, when used, applies in a number of ways: (1) A pedophile seeking his prey, (2) An adulterer/adulteress attempting to fulfill sexual desires in an ungodly way, (3) A job seeker lying by one or more means to obtain employment, such as falsifying an application (4) The politician seeking votes in order to be elected, (5) The gold digger/gigolo after somebody’s wealth, especially of the opposite gender, (6) Someone hunting to rent a house or apartment somewhere, and so, like the previously mentioned job seeker, falsifies the application, (7) A person vying to reach a certain goal through dishonest intentions, and (8) An individual (falsely so) wanting to prove that “the end justifies the means.” More examples could be used, but these given should more than suffice to prove this writer’s point.

Many persons existing who want their way all or most of the time will definitely employ sophistry. This method is also used to seize control of an individual, business, or a sought after position. Sophistry can be applied to part of what the young evangelist Timothy would have to face in the way of “perilous times” (2 Timothy 3:1). Verses 6-8 say of such a breed of people, “For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts,

Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith.” One can easily see by these passages that denominationalism, religious cults, sectarianism, splinter groups, and such like are products of this means known as sophistry. So, this culprit is of no value whatsoever to man’s soul!

There are those lowdown enough to use sophistry on their friends who trusted them to act otherwise, on their own mother and father, on their own children, on their boss, etc. Many will stop at absolutely nothing in the way of sophistry, if they feel such will bring about some sort of gratification, power, material gain and/or notoriety. They will use people as “stepping stones” to achieve their “victories!” One fictitious character remarked, when asked how he managed to live with himself in regards to how he was constantly wronging others, “When you get rid of the honesty and integrity, the rest is a piece of cake.” Another example of sophistry is in the area of retail sales – or any category of sales, for that matter. Lying, manipulation, and guile are used by some in this area in order to sell that product or service, so one can make that “commission.” Indeed, sophistry can desensitize the conscience, along with making many, many enemies, including some powerful enemies! Meeting early graves, broken marriages, divided churches, dissolved friendships, and closure of businesses have come about, due to sophistry. This sin is most disgusting! You see, like all other sins, nobody likes being struck by sophistry – including somebody else practicing sophistry!

While there is the possibility of practicing sophistry in any area of life, the category of false teachers must not be omitted here. The good Apostle Paul told the Roman brethren, “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly;

and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple” (Romans 16:17-18). The terms “good words” and “fair speeches” would indicate sophistry as a tool being utilized here. The entire chapter of 2 Peter 2 describes in quite detail sophistry, in regards to a certain brand of false teachers. Please read it and see. Sophistry loathes the complete truth on anything and everything, for this method seeks ill-gotten gain, both literally and figuratively. Therefore, this sneaky method of operation (known in the military as “M.O.”) will be despised and rejected by anyone seeking to live a thoroughly decent, wholesome, and honest life while on this earth. Both the old and New Testaments are listed with examples of sophistry.

Talk about deceit and seduction? While speaking His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught, “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them” (Matthew 7:15-20). Gentle reader, don’t underestimate the damnableness of false teachers and their Satanic doctrines! Search the scriptures on your own to see for yourself if what one says about the Bible is true, or if passages have been perverted (Acts 17:11; Philippians 2:12; 2 Timothy 2:15). Avoid their sophistry. Pay attention and listen fully to the Psalmist who declared, “Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way. Thy word is a lamp unto my feet. And a light unto my path (Psalm 119:104-105).

Surely, all of you who read this article can see how sophistry often gains respect from many unsuspecting people, (even the smartest of them!) in regards to unknowingly respecting the one(s) so cunningly practicing this devilish device! Would this

fact not also tells us that many a person has wound up in jail and/or prison, due to sophistry? Indubitably!

Sophistry cheats! Gyps! Steals! Robs! Emotionally, mentally, and physically rapes! Deprives! Nets losses of both a literal and figurative nature! The extreme love many have for money has also brought about sophistry (I Timothy 6:10). Sophistry's prey must often live with its consequences and versatile scars for life! May we avoid committing this dreadful act, along with striving to remain clear of being a victim to this (often) most hurtful menace! ■

Whittling at God's End of the Stick

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

I often use the above expression, but I confess that I borrowed it many years ago from brother Robert Turner. He never told me where he got it. Whatever the origin, it is a good expression.

God has revealed his word for us in terms that are, generally speaking, easy to understand, though some things are admittedly hard to understand. As Peter stated concerning Paul's writings, even in things hard to understand, we still have the responsibility to not wrest them to our destruction. The "unlearned" and "unstable" are not excused from the responsibility of handling the Scriptures aright because it may be a difficult passage. (See 2 Pet. 3:16).

Jesus has given us the responsibility to teach people "to observe **all** things whatsoever (he) has commanded (us)." (Matt. 28:20). I have no right to give anyone a pass on anything the Lord has commanded. I have no right to preach anything short of giving all "diligence to make your calling and election sure" by doing what he has commanded (2 Pet. 1:10). I must preach that "whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit

no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty." (Jas. 2:10-12). Notice that the "law" he is talking about is the "law of liberty" – the law we are to look into and do (Jas. 1:25). I must teach that we must love, trust, and obey God with all our hearts. I must tell folks of the command to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord (2 Pet. 3:18).

I also must teach that we have a faithful Savior, a Priest, an Advocate that we can trust to help in time of need. (Cf. Heb. 4:16; 1 John 2:1). He has promised not to allow us to be tempted beyond our ability and even make a way of escape for us (1 Cor. 10:13). I must teach that He has promised that those who continue in his word will know the truth and be made free (John 8:31-33) and "If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God ... (John 7:17 NKJV) I must teach that all Christians sin and that if they confess their sins that they will be forgiven (1 John 1:7-10).

All of that is whittling at our end of the stick.

Now for whittling at God's end of the stick.

Determining whether one has known enough, loved enough, trusted enough, obeyed enough, or grown enough is "God's end of the stick." It is not for me to "judge the law" (as to any points of law I think one can ignore or can be ignorant of, and to what extent and still please God) but I am to be a doer of it (Jas. 4:11) and to teach others to do likewise.

We are sometimes asked, "How can one feel happy and secure while being taught that we must obey "all things" he has commanded – when we know that we are not perfect. The answer is to trust the promises of our Savior, Priest and Advocate that we described above. The law of Christ was written to be obeyed, or to put it another way, "that ye sin not." But it is also written to tell us of the remedy for sin when we do sin. (1 John 1:7-2:1). Our security rests with Christ and his promises and not any supposed right we may have to determine which sins his grace will or will not cover when we fall short. ■