

## **Romans 7 v 14-25**

### Introduction

In last week's extract from Paul's spiritual biography, he laid bare his heart and soul. His discovery that keeping the Law could not save him. Law was holy, just and good, but it reveals, provokes and condemns sin. But we cannot – because we are sinners – be saved by keeping the Ten Commandments. The answer is in the atoning death of Jesus and renewing work of the Holy Spirit.

Now, if parts of Romans 7:1-13 among most complicated passages Paul ever wrote, Romans 7:14-25 among most controversial passages. Crucial issue is who is this "wretched man", Christian or non-Christian? If a Christian experience, is this normal Christian life or abnormal, abnormal because something gone wrong or missing?

### The Conflict Described

In verses 14-20 Paul says precisely same thing twice over, probably for emphasis. In 14-17, then 18-20. Almost exact parallel.

- (a) Each section begins with frank acknowledgment of our condition. What we are in ourselves. What we know ourselves to be. **For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin (7:14)**. Flesh within assaults. No match for it. In myself – I am its reluctant, resistant slave. **I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing (7:18)**.
- (b) Each section has vivid description of resulting conflict. **For what I would, that do I not, but what I hate, that do I (7:15)**. **For to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I find not (7:18)**. Just not able to put it into practice. **The good that I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do (7:19)**.
- (c) Each section ends with statement about cause. Cause is not in Law, which is spiritual. Not even I which that is the cause, because sin has own will. The cause is the indwelling of sin. The seat is the flesh, old sinful nature with which we were born. He knew what was right, wanted to do it, but could not somehow. Hated wrong, but did it, because evil always present in him. He felt himself to be split personality. Like two men inside one skin, pulled in two directions. A walking civil war. Haunted by this feeling of frustration – that he saw what was good but unable to do it. Saw what was wrong but could not refrain.

### To Whom does this Conflict Refer?

Great and controversial issue is –

- (a) Who is speaking here? – Paul as non-Christian? Looking back and tracing his experience and describing how he felt. Paul as unregenerate Jew trying to keep the Law. A variation on this idea is unregenerate man under conviction of sin, awakened to his sin.

- (b) Or is this the normal experience of every Christian in struggle with sin? This viewpoint shows that only regenerate man could delight in the Law of God. Present, not past tense. Those who do *not* feel they are the **wretched man**, are in unhealthy spiritual state, deceived about the condition of their heart, full of pride and deceit. All true Christians emit this groan daily and hourly. Deliverance they will have, not in this life but in life to come, when transformed into likeness of Christ at his coming.

Dr Alexander Whyte held this view. Used to tell his people “You’ll never get out of Romans 7 while I’m your minister” On another occasion “As often as my attentive bookseller sends me on approval another new commentary on Romans, I immediately turn to 7<sup>th</sup> chapter. If commentator sets up a man of straw in 7<sup>th</sup> chapter, I immediately shut the book. I at once send the book back and say No thank you. That is not the man for my hard-earned money”.

- (c) A third option, is that this description refers to Christian experience, but only the experience of a certain kind of Christian. Mention of “I”, “me” and “my” 30 times. No mention of Holy Spirit and indwelling Christ in Chapter 7. But in contrast over 20 references in chapter 8. This is because chapter 7 describes the Christian left to himself, not abiding in Christ, the Christian when he acts out of character. Born again man, relying on his own resources, neglecting means of grace. Out of touch, eyes off the Lord, eyes on himself.

Bishop Henry Moule wrote “we note this absolute and eloquent silence in it regarding the Holy Spirit.... Paul’s confession not of a long past experience, not of imagined experience, but of his own normal experience, when he acts out of character as a regenerate man. He fails, when being a sinner by nature still and in the body still, he meets the Law and temptation in any strength short of definitely sought power of the Holy Ghost making Christ all to him for peace and victory..... It is not that God is not sufficient.... But the man does not always adequately use God as he ought to do and might do”

As a Christian is never free from this condition, the moment he ignores the ministry of the Holy Spirit, Romans 7 is his immediate experience. He never passes once for all out of Romans 7 to Romans 8. Our situation when left to self, unless we seek aid of Holy Spirit constantly. Moral inability apart from the Holy Spirit. Hence presses on us need to take doctrine of Holy Spirit (as outlines in chapter 8) more seriously. Not Christian life as God intended it. But experience which describes very many Christians because they know little of the Holy Spirit, and those who know of him use him so little.

State of moral contradiction. Experience which warns us that there is no such thing as eradication of sin or sinless perfection.

In summary, this does seem to be Christian experience. No unconverted man delights in the Law of the Lord. NB also use of present tense. Problem in deciding between

options (b) and (c). Depends on perspective. The sense in which (b) is a normal experience – constant discovery of extent and depth of sin in our lives as we grow spiritually. Yet wish those who teach this perspective would also sound note of rejoicing and triumphing in the Lord. Can make Christian life sound such a miserable, unhappy, downtrodden life. Not happy unless wallowing, mourning and bemoaning their lot.

There is much to commend view (c). Absence of references to the Holy Spirit, and constant references to “I myself” are very significant. Scripture and experience suggest it does make difference to Christian’s life if he takes doctrine of Holy Spirit seriously. Whilst there is no sinless perfection, and the constant discovery of present and extent of sin causes grief and lament in life, still we are not under its heel or its helpless slave. Measure of triumphing and overcoming in his power and freedom, which many Christians seem to know little about. Progress does take place. Sin is not meant to have dominion over us. Great deal of difference in lives if we take seriously work of Holy Spirit as outlined in chapter 8.

Moule said “To hard-pressed soul there is unspeakable reality and power in thinking of him as a personal ally who is Counsellor, Lord and life-giver, and in calling him definitely in”

### Way of Deliverance in Conflict

**O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord (7:24-25).** “Body of death” may refer to mortal body from which we are rescued at Lord’s coming when spiritual body is imparted free from indwelling sin. Or it may be a reference to “body of sin” of Romans 6:6 (human nature controlled by sin). Deliverance is in Jesus Christ our Lord. Not through suppressing evil nature, nor by eradication, but by counteraction. (Details in chapter 8 on Holy Spirit). The power of a superior power counteracting other Law. Law of Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

Someone falling off end of pier, by law of gravity, begins to sink. Law of sin. Lifebelt is thrown – safety by law of floating bodies. Law of Spirit of life. By one law he sinks, by another law he stays alive. Condition of continuing safety – remaining in lifebelt. Why doesn’t aeroplane, according to law of gravity with its downward pull, fall to the ground? Reason – by law of aerodynamics it is mastered by new law, able to overcome gravity, and soar into the heavens.

W.Y.Fullerton “Salvation is like marriage, not a change of one but union of two. So also salvation like marriage is not a change of one but union of two – you and Christ; but union of two changes the one”.

### Conclusion

- (a) To the unregenerate. If this passage is true of believers, how much more of us? Impossibility of trying to live good life in reliance on self. More we try, worse we feel.
- (b) To the regenerate. How utterly impossible to live Christian life on own. To unconverted we say “No use just doing your best. You must have God’s best”.

But exactly what we do in living Christian life. Doing best is not way into salvation or sanctification. God has something better than our best. **I thank God through Christ Jesus.**

- (c) To the backslider. Out of touch with the Lord? No real fellowship with the Lord? “Wretched man”. Need to return to the Lord. Occupy self with Christ. Allow Holy Spirit to reign supreme, so that by his counteractive power we shall triumph. Realise powerlessness and helplessness regarding sin and our ability to obey. Christ is the secret of it all. Christ for us is our justification. Christ in us is our sanctification.

As we have received Christ Jesus the Lord so we are to walk in him. Daily choice – my resources or his? My control or his? Eyes on Christ or on myself?