

# Present Truth

A magazine dedicated  
to the restoration  
of New Testament Christianity  
in this generation

*Sola Gratia*      Solely by Grace  
*Solo Christo*     Solely by Christ  
*Sola Fide*        Solely by Faith

Vol 6 # 3

## THE MAN OF ROMANS 7:14-25

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# Present Truth

**Present Truth** is a magazine dedicated to the restoration of New Testament Christianity and committed to upholding the great Reformation principle of justification by faith.

Editor: Robert D. Brinsmead  
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**Publishers:** A group of Christian scholars and businessmen without denominational sponsorship who have united to uphold the objective gospel amid the present deluge of religious subjectivism. Multitudes are being caught up in the popular and frantic effort to find satisfaction in some sort of religious experience. *Present Truth* is a voice in this barren wilderness of groveling internalism, a voice which boldly proclaims those great principles upon which the Reformation was founded—namely:

1. *Sola gratia.* God's saving activity outside of us in the person of Jesus Christ is the sole *ground* of our salvation.

2. *Solo Christo.* Christ's doing and dying on our behalf is the sole *basis* of our acceptance and continued fellowship with God.

3. *Sola fide.* The Holy Spirit's gift of faith through the hearing of this objective, historical gospel is the sole *means* whereby Christ's substitutionary life and death are imputed to us for justification unto life eternal. He who is thus justified by faith and filled with God's Spirit will glory only in Christ's cross and make God's saving work in Christ the central affirmation of his Christian witness. Though he will be careful to obey God and please Him in all things, he will continue to repent rather than glory in the feeble attainments of his own Spirit-filled life.

4. *Sola Scriptura.* The Bible and the Bible only is the Christian's objective and infallible rule of faith and practice, alone sufficient that he may "be established in the present truth" (2 Peter 1:12). It is the God-ordained account of and witness to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

*Present Truth* is not only committed to the task of upholding these founding principles of the Reformation, but it believes that we today must allow these principles to call all that we do and all that we teach into question. These principles call all traditions into question and all statements about the truth into question—even the ones set forth in this magazine. Our vision is a new Reformation that will recover what the Reformers bequeathed us and complete the restoration they so nobly began.

*Present Truth* is committed to the time-honored verities of the Christian faith—such as the Trinity, deity of Christ, virgin birth, blood atonement, bodily resurrection and ascension, second coming, final judgment, justification by faith alone, sanctification through the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit, and glorification at Christ's soon return.

The *Present Truth* ministry receives no denominational support. It is made possible through contributions from those who are dedicated to the restoration of New Testament Christianity and committed to upholding the great Reformation principle of justification by faith. Your support is appreciated. All gifts are tax deductible in the U.S.A.

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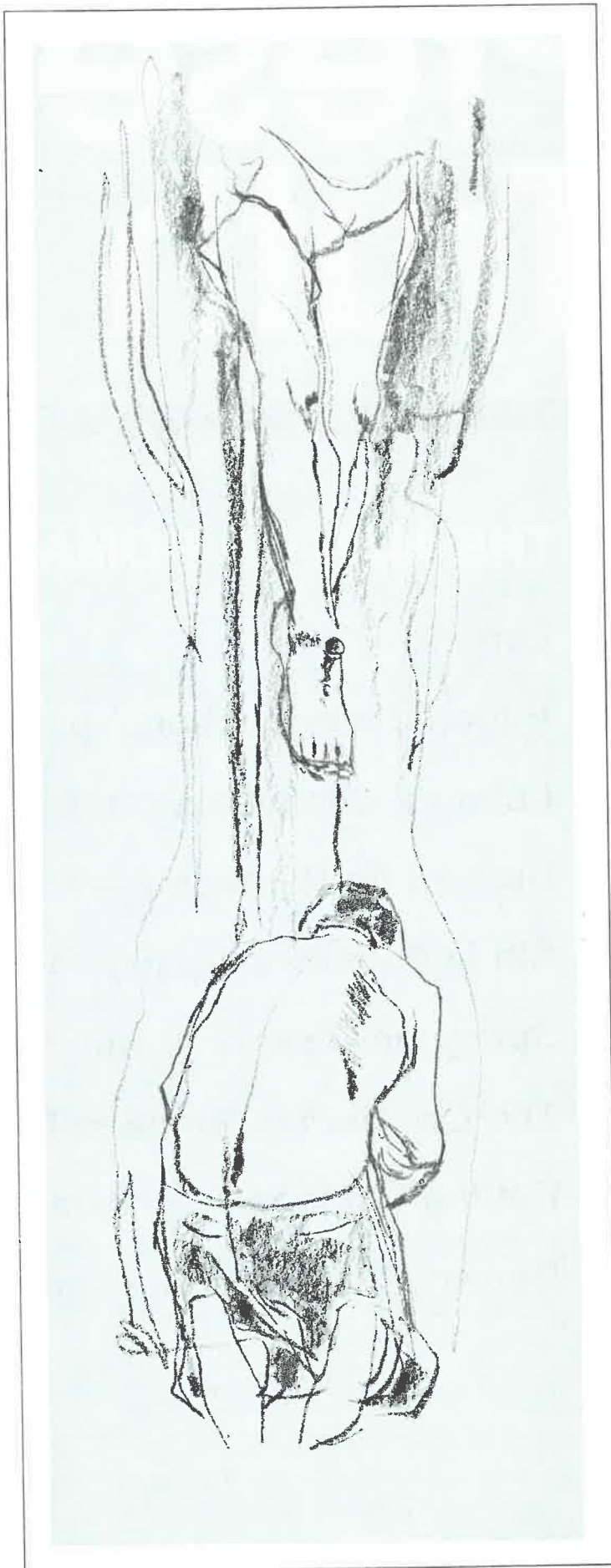
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**To Contributors:** Since truth is above the preferences and prejudices of any denomination, the editors welcome contributions from anyone and will judge them on their merit alone. If you wish a manuscript returned, please send a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

**Moving?** Please send your change of address four weeks in advance. Be sure to include both your old and new address.

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# Letters

Address Letters to *Present Truth*,  
P.O. Box 1311, Fallbrook,  
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## "Theology and Body"

Sir / Your issue of February, 1977, "Theology and Body," was timely. Sometimes Christianity tends to be so heavenly minded that it is of no earthly good, but this issue was a good example of theology practically applied. The article by George Eldon Ladd, "The Greek Versus the Hebrew View of Man," points up the need of recognizing our "cultural idols." Those of us who have been educated in Western culture have unconsciously grown up with distorted views of the nature of man which our civilization received from the Greeks. When we read the Bible, we fail to receive the message God has for us because of our culturally learned bias.

The Greek view is the distorted self-image of the natural man. He sees himself, not as a whole being, but as fragmented. But the biblical view is that of man as he was made in God's image and likeness and as revealed in Jesus, the second Adam. The message and ministry of Christ was to make man whole. Perhaps this explains why He spent more time healing than he did preaching—because He was a whole Man Himself, "the fulness of the Godhead bodily" and He longed to make men whole. Man was made this way in the beginning, a whole soul (creature) in the image of his Maker, and as such he had no problem in understanding God. But sin brought fragmentation and distortion of the image, and man's own distorted self-image was projected to God, and the world became filled with false concepts of God. Christ came as the second Adam to restore the image of God in man—physically, mentally and spiritually.

Arlin Baldwin  
California

Sir / Congratulations on the article by D. Weston Allen, "How Spiritual Health Is Impaired by Neglect of Physical and Mental Health," which appeared in your February issue on "Theology and Body." Through God's grace I have for some months been on an aerobic conditioning program, and now, after several hundred miles of running, I must admit that I feel tremendously better equipped to face life.

I believe that Christianity is a balanced way of life, and your chart showing how the spiritual, mental and physical areas blend into one another was just great. I submit that every Christian should seriously endeavor to find a suitable personal balance in this respect. By doing so, he will eventually discover a more complete and

wholesome way of life.

There is a need in today's soft society to do away with *easy* living in favor of *healthy* living. Certainly it is about time that we started getting some physical and mental aspects into our often narrowed-down perspective of Christianity. After all, if we would study the life of our Lord carefully, we would find these aspects present.

Arthur Lee  
Singapore

## "Covenant"

Sir / Thank you for your magazine. The two issues featuring "Covenant" (Nov., Dec., 1976) were outstanding. I have never read a better treatment of such an important subject.

D. O. Peach  
Lutheran Pastor  
Australia

Sir / Your article on "The Signs and Seals of the Covenant" (Dec., 1976) was not only fair and biblical but helpful in its clearcut manner of presenting salvation by grace alone through the means God alone could ordain.

Timothy Vettrus  
Lutheran Pastor  
Canada

## Pietistic Perfectionism

Sir / I find *Present Truth* quite unique in today's world of pietistic and popish perfectionism. Your journal is a breath of fresh air that the Christian world needs in order to get our feet back on the ground of faith which was preached by the apostolic church founded by our Lord Jesus Christ.

John C. Phillips  
Indiana

## Normal Christian Life

Sir / I want to tell you how much I appreciated your issue on "Sanctification" (Feb., 1975). After years of a diet of victorious-life teaching, it was surely refreshing. I think the so-called victorious-life teaching ends up with a defeated Christian life; it did for me. I have begun to see what the "normal Christian life" is.

Mrs. Sheila Jean  
Alabama

## Off Center

Sir / I feel that you are just as far off center

as is the charismatic movement. I'm sure both of you will have an equal number of deceived souls in hell before your wickedness is finished.

You continually downgrade the "subjective" gospel for the futherance of your "objective" one. Your play on words is fine for the intellectuals that your ministry caters to—a ministry which we are told in Colossians 2:8 to "beware of." I could go on for several more pages, but I doubt if your "intellectual" mind could take much more of my simple jabber.

James M. Turner  
Oklahoma

## On Target

Sir / Thank you for producing an outstanding publication. It is right on target. I have appreciated your clear teaching on the reliability of the Word of God, on justification by faith, and the forthright treatment you have given to the present trend toward subjective experience as apart from, and indeed superior to, the clear teaching of divine truth. May God bless you and strengthen your witness.

J. Merle Bandy  
Pastor  
California

## Stimulating

Sir / Thank you for the regular arrival of *Present Truth*. It gives me much pleasure by its well-written and thought-provoking articles. Of course, one does not necessarily agree with all that is written, but the presentation of other views is stimulating.

C. Cato-Symonds  
Minister  
England

## Ruinination

Sir / "Reformation?" Your magazine is a ruinination! "Dedicated to the restoration of New Testament Christianity?" You plan to bring about a ruinination of New Testament Christianity.

Edward R. Sather  
California

## Second Reformation

Sir / *Present Truth* is a continuous blessing to read. I find the articles beneficial spiritually and for wisdom. As an assistant pastor with a limited book supply, your magazine

coverage is indeed a source of knowledge that is most useful. I pray that you will continue in your striving for a second Reformation in our spiritual outlook and attitude.

Robert Thistle  
Pastor  
Canada

### Keep Publishing

Sir / Thank you for your publication. Justification by faith is a topic that needs more broadcasting than it is given by churches today. In today's liberal-minded religious circles it is a topic seldom, if ever, discussed. Keep publishing your magazine and telling the world of the central theme of the Scriptures.

Marla S. Kratts  
New York

### Appreciates Emphasis

Sir / *Present Truth* has become of utmost importance to me in my study of God's Word. Among the number of magazines that cross my desk there are only two that I consider collectors items, and yours is one. For the clarity and emphasis of your teaching on justification I am deeply appreciative and indebted. I cannot help but believe that in the years to come much fruit will be seen from your labor.

Fred Hudson  
Church of Christ Minister  
Texas

### Election and Grace

Sir / Thank you for your magazine. I have received tremendous benefit in considering its contents. Especially helpful have been insights into a previously difficult area for me—election and grace. I believe that I am beginning to see some light on these matters. I appreciate your stimulating writing and look forward to receiving each issue.

Darwin Chandler  
Church of Christ Evangelist  
Texas

### Enlightened

Sir / I have been very impressed and spiritually enlightened by *Present Truth*, given to me by our Presbyterian minister. You have penetrated the superficial to get at the basic truth where the latter parts company with error. I love the *sola gratia, solo Christo, sola fide*, and *sola Scriptura*. Thank God you are standing where Luther stood!

Hugh Flemming  
Canada

### Knotty Problem

Sir / I look forward to your outstanding publication, *Present Truth*. I have enjoyed wrestling with the knotty problem of being both an evangelical Christian (Presbyterian) and a scientist. I have often found that God has led me into situations of wit-

nessing to someone where it has been necessary to *really* know what I believe—and the basis for that belief.

Your magazine has been an important factor in my searching for perspectives. It has been my pleasure to introduce several, including our minister, to *Present Truth*.

Don Peterson  
Research Physicist  
Alabama

### Likes Cassette Tapes

Sir / Having now been acquainted with *Present Truth's* literary power for almost a year, I have definitely grasped more truth through its instrumentality than I have in four years of consistent attendance at numerous evangelical meetings and the like. I am sure that many readers of *Present Truth* can similarly testify to its much-needed presentation of the objective gospel.

But I wonder just how many readers of *Present Truth* are also aware of its effective tape ministry. I fear that not enough readers have given ear to the voices of R. D. Brinsmead and G. J. Paxton on tape. Only after recently receiving some cassette tapes have I come to appreciate and fully accept the doctrine of justification by faith. Now the back issues of *Present Truth* have become to me "thoughts that breathe and words that burn." It is my prayer that more readers will take advantage of the twofold ministry of *Present Truth*.

Carlton Hammond  
Alabama

### Charitable?

Sir / I wonder if you really believe you are "the people and that wisdom will die with you," as Job said of his friends. I find your uncharitableness saddening.

Arthur C. Custance  
Canada

Sir / There are very few Christian writers of your caliber who, while expounding and standing fast on the Word of truth, at the same time show forth such warmth and charity for our fellow Christians in Catholic and evangelical circles, as well as Pentecostal, who still mix much error with their devotion to our God. I thank God for your work.

Anita Wheeler  
Connecticut

### Disillusioned

Sir / Having recently returned from Brazil after fifteen years of service as a missionary trying to put New Testament principles into practice, I came across your publication in the home of a friend and would appreciate very much receiving it. It seems necessary to acquire all the information I can on the so-called charismatic move-

ment. This movement has left thousands completely disillusioned in Brazil, and I am sure it is doing the same here.

Floyd Pierce  
Illinois

### Experiential Rubbish

Sir / At times one begins to weary of the continual onslaught which threatens to submerge the gospel of Christ in a sea of subjectivism and liberalism. And then along comes a publication like *Present Truth*, and one begins to sense that the battle has faltered for lack of ammunition. Thank you, not only for the logistical base grounded on the Holy Scriptures, but for the inspiration to continue to stand on the objective truth rather than the experiential, emotionalistic rubbish so prevalent today. Fight the good fight, wage the good warfare, proclaim the truth in all of its splendor and power, and perhaps an omnipotent God may yet save this generation from itself.

T.J. Campbell  
Marine Sergeant  
Arizona

### Helped

Sir / As a Christian living in a truly non-Christian environment of a nuclear-powered submarine, I find great encouragement and some very strong help from *Present Truth*. I really believe that its message to those men who feel themselves too intelligent to believe in and follow the living God is unavoidable.

Michael S. Myers  
Navy Lieutenant

### Out of Context

Sir / You refer to Martin Luther too much in your articles rather than the Bible. When you do use Scripture, you twist it and take it out of context.

Gene Deo  
California

### Much to Learn

Sir / I am only a recent student of theology, but I appreciate your strong perspective on Reformation Christianity. It does not take too sharp an observer of the present situation of the church to see that we need to recover some things. And I suspect we have much to learn from close application to scriptural truth and the writings of the Reformers and other godly men. God bless you in your effort to remind us.

R. Lee Ware  
Ohio

### Joy to Read

Sir / I very much appreciate your magazine. Your fresh translations and clear terms (as well as the easily-read type) make it a joy to read. I look forward to each issue.

Henry F. Koch  
Lutheran Minister  
Wisconsin





## Editorial Introduction

In this issue of *Present Truth* we bring together some articles by Luther, Bunyan, Wesley, Spurgeon, Pink and the contemporary English scholar, James D. G. Dunn. In one way or another all these articles relate to the man of Romans 7:14-25 and, we believe, throw some light on this passage. We have also included a section of our own, which tries to put Romans 7:14-25 into perspective by looking at some basic concepts of New Testament theology.

Most of our readers will be well aware that Romans 7:14-25 has a very interesting history of interpretation. Augustine changed his mind about its meaning and found in the passage some very valuable ammunition to oppose Pelagius. The Reformers made great use of it in their opposition to Rome. Many of the Pietists, the Arminians and the Wesleyans defected from the position held by the Reformers. But John Wesley, in his sermon, "Sin in Believers," seems to have changed his stance on Romans 7:14-25. At least his thoughts in this sermon harmonize very well with Luther and Calvin. If Wesley did change his views on Romans 7, he is certainly not the only one who has. This editor would be included in that company too.

In the modern scene the majority of scholars do not hold to the interpretation of the Reformers but agree with the interpretation given by most Roman Catholics. However, the historical side of this matter is not so simple, because Aquinas, one of the greatest Catholic theologians of them all, held the same position on Romans 7:14-25 as did Augustine and the Reformers.

This passage poses some pressing problems which

need answering. Those who think that Romans 7:14-25 describes a regenerate Christian need to face the following questions: Did the Reformers and orthodox Protestantism adopt a view of the Christian life and its possibilities which was altogether too negative? If we say that Romans 7:14-25 describes a man like Saint Paul, does this do justice to the freedom and joy of the Spirit-filled life which are often held out as a real possibility in the New Testament? Do not many professed Christians use Romans 7:14-25 to excuse their bondage to their carnal nature instead of rising above it in Christ? Is not Romans 7:14-25 made into a soft pillow on which hypocrites lay their heads? But for a certain view of Romans 7, would not many Christians strive to live on a higher plane of existence?

Nor can those who believe that Romans 7:14-25 describes the man who is less than an ideal Christian escape some serious questions—such as: Will not a gospel which promises only triumphant living result in converts who sooner or later become discouraged or deceitful about their Christian experience? Is there not a real danger of romanticizing the Christian life in such a way that it does not face realism?

Maybe we are faced with the old question of how to use Scripture skillfully so that it will afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted. At least that should be the result when the message of the Bible is correctly handled.

Come, let us reason together.

R.D.B.



## Luther's Comments on Galatians 5:17

*Editorial Note:* As is well known, all the Reformers held the view that Romans 7:14-25 is a description of the spiritual conflict of a regenerate believer. Sometimes the view of the Reformers has been distorted by those who think that Romans 7:14-25 gives comfort to people who hold a pessimistic view of the possibilities and attainments of Christian piety in the here and now. Martin Luther's comments on Galatians 5:17 help to set the record straight. He does not use Galatians 5:17 or Romans 7 to excuse the Christian's falling into sin, much less being ruled by it. Here indeed is a bit of the real Luther at his best.

Reprinted from Martin Luther, *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, tr. Philip S. Watson (Cambridge & London: James Clarke, 1953), pp. 501-508.

### **For the Flesh Lusteth Against the Spirit, and the Spirit Against the Flesh**

When Paul said that the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, he admonisheth us that we shall feel the concupiscence of the flesh, that is to say, not only carnal lust, but also pride, wrath, heaviness, impatience, incredulity, and such-like. Notwithstanding he would have us so to feel them, that we consent not unto them, nor accomplish them: that is, that we neither think, speak, nor do those things which the flesh provoketh us unto. As, if it move us to anger, yet we should be angry in such wise as we are taught in the fourth Psalm, that we sin not. As if Paul

would thus say: I know that the flesh will provoke you unto wrath, envy, doubting, incredulity, and such-like: but resist it by the Spirit, that ye sin not. But if ye forsake the guiding of the Spirit, and follow the flesh, ye shall fulfil the lust of the flesh, and ye shall die, as Paul saith in the eighth to the Romans. So this saying of the Apostle is to be understood, not of fleshly lusts only, but of the whole kingdom of sin.

### **And These Are Contrary One to the Other, So That Ye Cannot Do the Things That Ye Would**

These two captains or leaders (saith he), the flesh and the spirit, are one against another in your body, so that ye cannot do what ye would. And this place witnesseth plainly that Paul writeth these things to the saints, that is, to the Church believing in Christ, baptized, justified, renewed, and having full forgiveness of sins. Yet notwithstanding he saith that she hath flesh rebelling against the spirit. After the same manner he speaketh of himself in the seventh to the Romans: 'I (saith he) am carnal and sold under sin;' and again: 'I see another law in my members rebelling against the law of my mind,' &c.; also: 'O wretched man that I am,' &c.

Here, not only the schoolmen, but also some of the old fathers are much troubled, seeking how they may excuse Paul. For it seemeth unto them absurd and unseemly to say, that that elect vessel of Christ should have sin. But we credit Paul's own words, wherein he plainly confesseth that he is sold under sin, that he is led captive of sin, that he hath a law in his members rebelling against him, and that in the flesh he serveth the law of sin. Here again they answer, that the Apostle speaketh in the person of the ungodly. But the ungodly do not complain of the rebellion of their flesh, of any battle or conflict, or of the captivity and bondage of sin: for sin mightily reigneth in them. This is therefore the very complaint of Paul and of all the saints. Wherefore they have done very wickedly which have excused Paul and other saints to have no sin. For by this persuasion (which proceedeth of ignorance of the doctrine of faith) they have robbed the Church of a singular consolation: they have abolished the forgiveness of sins, and made Christ of none effect.

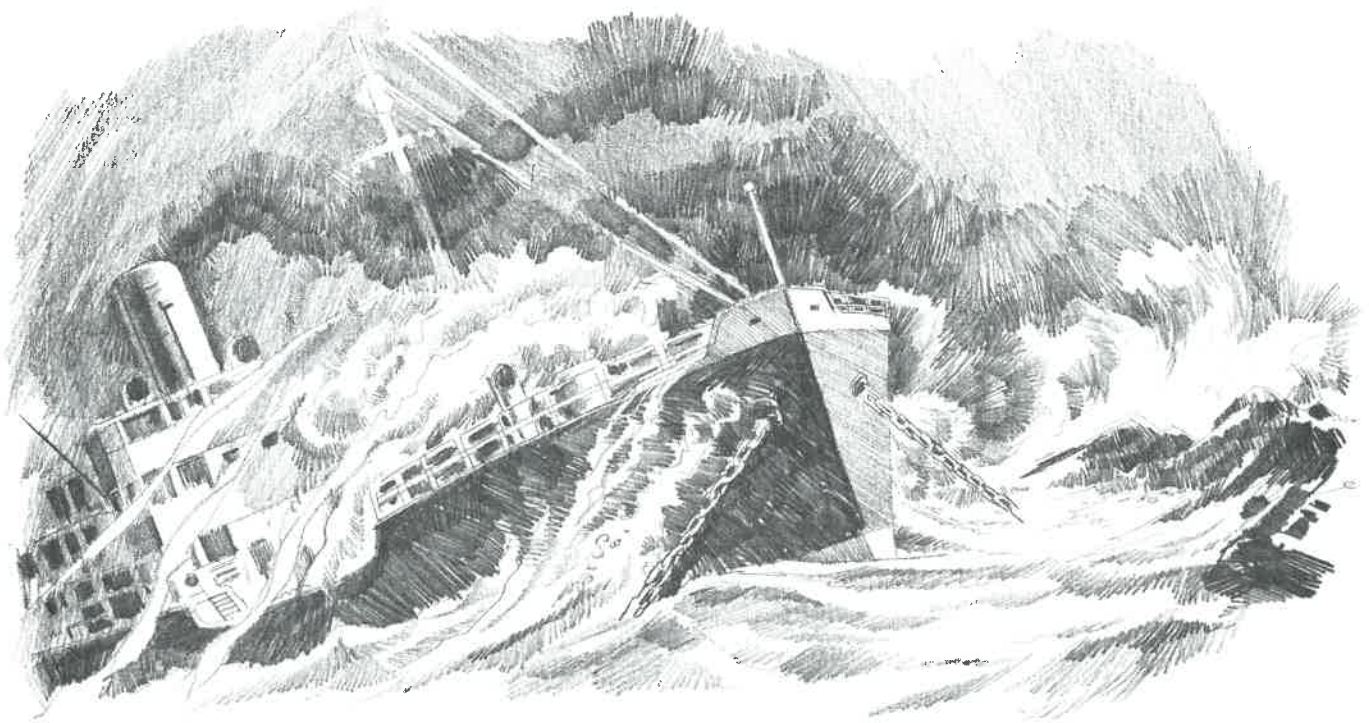
Wherefore when Paul saith: 'I see another law in my members,' &c., he denieth not that he hath flesh, and the vices of the flesh in him. It is likely therefore that he



Luther

felt sometimes the motions of carnal lust. But yet (I have no doubt) these motions were well suppressed in him by the great and grievous [afflictions and] temptations both of mind and body, wherewith he was in a manner continually exercised and vexed, as his epistles do declare; or if he at any time being merry and strong, felt the lust of the flesh, wrath, impatency, and such-like, yet he resisted them by the Spirit, and suffered not those motions to bear rule in him. Therefore let us in no wise suffer such comfortable places (whereby Paul describeth the battle of the flesh against the spirit in his own body) to be corrupted with such foolish glosses. The schoolmen, the monks, and such other, never felt any spiritual temptations, and therefore they fought only for the repressing and overcoming of fleshly lust and lechery, and being proud of that victory which they never yet obtained, they thought themselves far better and more holy than married men. I will not say, that under this holy pretence they nourished and maintained all kinds of horrible sins, as dissension, pride, hatred, disdain, and despising of their neighbours, trust in their own righteousness, presumption, contempt of godliness and of the Word of God, infidelity, blasphemy, and such-like. Against these sins they never fought, nay rather they took them to be no sins at all: they put righteousness in the keeping of their foolish and wicked vows, and unrighteousness in the neglecting and contemning of the same.





**This must be our ground and anchor-hold, that Christ is our only perfect righteousness. Moreover, we must labour to be outwardly righteous also: that is to say, not to consent to the flesh, which always enticeth us to some evil; but to resist it by the spirit.**

But this must be our ground and anchor-hold, that Christ is our only perfect righteousness. If we have nothing whereunto we may trust, yet these three things (as Paul saith) faith, hope and love do remain. Therefore we must always believe and always hope; we must always take hold of Christ as the head and fountain of our righteousness. He that believeth in him shall not be ashamed. Moreover, we must labour to be outwardly righteous also: that is to say, not to consent to the flesh, which always enticeth us to some evil; but to resist it by the spirit. We must not be overcome with impatience for the unthankfulness and contempt of the people, which abuseth the Christian liberty; but through the

Spirit we must overcome this and all other temptations. Look then how much we strive against the flesh by the spirit, so much are we outwardly righteous. Albeit this righteousness doth not commend us before God.

Let no man therefore despair if he feel the flesh oftentimes to stir up new battles against the spirit, or if he cannot by and by subdue the flesh, and make it obedient unto the spirit. I also do wish myself to have a more valiant and constant heart, which might be able, not only boldly to contemn the threatenings of tyrants, the heresies, offences and tumults which the fantastical spirits stir up; but also might by and by shake off the vexations and anguish of spirit, and briefly, might not fear the sharpness of death, but receive and embrace it as a most friendly guest. But I find another law in my members, rebelling against the law of my mind, &c. Some other do wrestle with inferior temptations, as poverty, reproach, impatience and such-like.

Let no man marvel therefore or be dismayed, when he feelth in his body this battle of the flesh against the spirit: but let him pluck up his heart and comfort himself with these words of Paul: 'The flesh lusteth against the spirit,' &c., and: 'These are contrary one to another, so that ye do not those things that ye would.' For by these sentences he comforteth them that be tempted. As if he should say: It is impossible for you to follow the guiding of the Spirit in all things without any feeling or hindrance of the flesh; nay, the flesh will resist: and

## Let no man despair if he feel the flesh oftentimes to stir up new battles against the spirit, or if he cannot by and by subdue the flesh, and make it obedient unto the spirit.

so resist and hinder you that ye cannot do those things that gladly ye would. Here, it shall be enough if ye resist the flesh and fulfil not the lust thereof: that is to say, if ye follow the spirit and not the flesh, which easily is overthrown by impatency, coveteth to revenge, biteth, grudgeth, hateth God, is angry with him, despaireth, &c. Therefore when a man feeleth this battle of the flesh, let him not be discouraged therewith, but let him resist in the Spirit, and say: I am a sinner, and I feel sin in me, for I have not yet put off the flesh, in which sin dwelleth so long as it liveth; but I will obey the spirit and not the flesh: that is, I will by faith and hope lay hold upon Christ, and by his word I will raise up myself, and being so raised up, I will not fulfil the lust of the flesh.

It is very profitable for the godly to know this, and to bear it well in mind; for it wonderfully comforteth them when they are tempted. When I was a monk I thought by and by that I was utterly cast away, if at any time I felt the concupiscence of the flesh: that is to say, if I felt any evil motion, fleshly lust, wrath, hatred, or envy against any brother. I assayed many ways, I went to confession daily, &c., but it profited me not; for the concupiscence of my flesh did always return, so that I could not rest, but was continually vexed with these thoughts: This or that sin thou hast committed; thou art infected with envy, with impatency, and such other sins; therefore thou art entered into this holy order in vain, and all thy good works are unprofitable. If then I had rightly understood these sentences of Paul: 'The flesh lusteth contrary to the spirit, and the spirit contrary to the flesh,' &c. and 'these two are one against another, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would do,' I should not have so miserably tormented myself, but should have thought and said to myself, as now commonly I do: Martin, thou shalt not utterly be without sin, for thou hast yet flesh; thou shalt therefore feel the battle thereof, according to that saying of Paul: 'The flesh resisteth the spirit.' Despair not therefore, but resist it strongly, and fulfil not the lust thereof. Thus doing thou art not under the law.

I remember that Staupitius was wont to say: 'I have vowed unto God above a thousand times, that I would become a better man; but I never performed that which I vowed. Hereafter I will make no such vow: for I have now learned by experience, that I am not able to perform it. Unless therefore God be favourable and merci-

ful unto me for Christ's sake, and grant unto me a blessed and a happy hour when I shall depart out of this miserable life, I shall not be able with all my vows and all my good deeds, to stand before him.' This was not only a true, but also a godly and a holy desperation: and this must they all confess both with mouth and heart, which will be saved. For the godly trust not to their own righteousness, but say with David: 'Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight shall none that liveth be justified' (Ps. cxliii. 2), and: 'If thou O Lord shouldst straightly mark iniquities, O Lord who shall stand?' (Ps. cxxx. 3). They look unto Christ their reconciler, who gave his life for their sins. Moreover, they know that the remnant of sin which is in their flesh, is not laid to their charge, but freely pardoned. Notwithstanding in the meanwhile they fight in the Spirit against the flesh, lest they should fulfil the lust thereof. And although they feel the flesh to rage and rebel against the spirit, and themselves also do fall sometimes into sin through infirmity, yet are they not discouraged, nor think therefore that their state and kind of life, and the works which are done according to their calling, displease God: but they raise up themselves by faith.

The faithful therefore receive great consolation by this doctrine of Paul, in that they know themselves to have partly the flesh, and partly the spirit, but yet so notwithstanding that the spirit ruleth and the flesh is subdued, that righteousness reigneth and sin serveth. He that knoweth not this doctrine, and thinketh that the faithful ought to be without all fault, and yet seeth the contrary in himself, must needs at the length be swallowed up by the spirit of heaviness, and fall into desperation. But whoso knoweth this doctrine well and useth

## He that thinketh that the faithful ought to be without all fault, and yet seeth the contrary in himself, must needs at length be swallowed up by the spirit of heaviness, and fall into desperation.



## It profiteth us very much to feel sometimes the wickedness of our nature and corruption of our flesh, that even by this means we may be waked and stirred up to faith and to call upon Christ.

it rightly, to him the things that are evil turn unto good. For when the flesh provoketh him to sin, by occasion thereof he is stirred up and forced to seek forgiveness of sins by Christ, and to embrace the righteousness of faith, which else he would not so greatly esteem, nor seek for the same with so great desire. Therefore it profiteth us very much to feel sometimes the wickedness of our nature and corruption of our flesh, that even by this means we may be waked and stirred up to faith and to call upon Christ. And by this occasion a Christian becometh a mighty workman and a wonderful creator, which of heaviness can make joy, of terror comfort, of sin righteousness, and of death life, when he by this means repressing and bridling the flesh, maketh it subject to the Spirit.

Wherefore let not them which feel the concupiscence of the flesh, despair of their salvation. Let them feel it and all the force thereof, so that they consent not to it. Let the passions of lust, wrath and such other vices shake them, so that they do not overthrow them. Let sin assail them, so that they do not accomplish it. Yea the more godly a man is, the more doth he feel that battle. And hereof come those lamentable complaints of the saints in the Psalms and in all the holy Scripture. Of this battle the hermits, the monks, and the schoolmen, and all that seek righteousness and salvation by works, know nothing at all.

But here may some man say, that it is a dangerous matter to teach that a man is not condemned, if by and by he overcome not the motions and passions of the flesh which he feeleth. For when this doctrine is taught amongst the common people, it maketh them careless, negligent and slothful. This is it which I said a little before, that if we teach faith, then carnal men neglect and reject works: if works be required, then is faith and consolation of conscience lost. Here no man can be compelled, neither can there be any certain rule prescribed. But let every man diligently try himself to what passion of the flesh he is most subject, and when he findeth that, let him not be careless, nor flatter himself: but let him watch and wrestle in Spirit against it, that if he cannot altogether bridle it, yet at the least he do not fulfil the lust thereof.

This battle of the flesh against the spirit, all the saints

have had and felt: and the selfsame do we also feel and prove. He that searcheth his own conscience, if he be not an hypocrite, shall well perceive that to be true in himself which Paul here saith: that the flesh lusteth against the spirit. All the faithful therefore do feel and confess that their flesh resisteth against the spirit, and that these two are so contrary the one to the other in themselves, that, do what they can, they are not able to perform that which they would do. Therefore the flesh hindereth us that we cannot keep the commandments of God, that we cannot love our neighbours as ourselves, much less can we love God with all our heart, &c. Therefore it is impossible for us to become righteous by the works of the law. Indeed there is a good will in us, and so must there be (for it is the Spirit itself which resisteth the flesh), which would gladly do good, fulfil the law, love God and his neighbour, and such-like, but the flesh obeyeth not this good will, but resisteth it: and yet God imputeth not unto us this sin, for he is merciful to those that believe, for Christ's sake.

But it followeth not therefore that thou shouldest make a light matter of sin, because God doth not impute it. True it is that he doth not impute it: but to whom, and for what cause? Not to them that are hard-hearted and secure, but to such as repent and lay hold by faith upon Christ the mercy-seat, for whose sake, as all their sins are forgiven them, even so the remnants of sin which are in them, be not imputed unto them. They make not their sin less than it is, but amplify it and set it out as it is indeed; for they know that it cannot be put away by satisfactions, works, or righteousness, but only by the death of Christ. And yet notwithstanding, the greatness and enormity of their sin doth not cause them to despair, but they assure themselves that the same shall not be imputed unto them [or laid unto their charge], for Christ's sake.

This I say, lest any man should think that after faith is received, there is little account to be made of sin. Sin is truly sin, whether a man commit it before he hath received the knowledge of Christ or after. And God always hateth sin: yea all sin is damnable as touching the fact

**All the faithful do feel and confess that their flesh resisteth against the spirit, and that these two are so contrary the one to the other in themselves, that, do what they can, they are not able to perform that which they would do.**



itself. But in that it is not damnable to him that believeth, it cometh of Christ the reconciler, who by his death hath expiated sin. But to him that believeth not in Christ, not only all his sins are damnable, but even his good works also are sin; according to that saying: 'Whatsoever is not of faith is sin' (Rom. xiv. 23). Therefore the error of the schoolmen is most pernicious, which do distinguish sins according to the fact, and not according to the person. He that believeth hath as great sin as the unbeliever. But to him that believeth, it is forgiven and not imputed: to the unbeliever it is not pardoned but imputed. To the believer it is venial: to the unbeliever it is mortal [and damnable]: not for any difference of sins, or because the sin of the believer is less, and the sin of the unbeliever greater: but for the difference of the persons. For the believer assureth himself by faith that his sin is forgiven him, forasmuch as Christ hath given himself for it. Therefore although he have sin in him and daily sinneth, yet he continueth godly: but contrariwise, the unbeliever continueth wicked. And this is the true wisdom and consolation of the godly, that although they have and commit sins, yet they know that for Christ's sake they are not imputed unto them.

This I say for the comfort of the godly. For they only feel indeed that they have and do commit sins, that is to say, they feel they do not love God so fervently as they should do; that they do not trust him so heartily as they would, but rather they oftentimes doubt whether God have a care of them or no; they are impatient, and are angry with God in adversity. Hereof (as I have said) proceed the sorrowful complaints of the saints in the Scriptures, and especially in the Psalms. And Paul himself complaineth that he is 'sold under sin' (Rom. vii. 14); and here he saith that the flesh resisteth and rebelleth against the spirit. But because they mortify the deeds of the flesh by the spirit (as he saith in another place; and also in the end of this chapter: 'They crucify the flesh with the desires and lusts thereof'), therefore these sins do not hurt them nor condemn them. But if they obey the flesh in fulfilling the lusts thereof, then do they lose faith and the Holy Ghost. And if they do not abhor their sin and return unto Christ (who hath given the keys to his Church, to receive and raise up those that be fallen, that so they may recover faith and the Holy Ghost), they die in their sins. Wherefore we speak not of them which dream that they have faith, and yet continue still in their sins. These men have their judgment already: They that live after the flesh shall die (Rom. viii. 13), also: 'The works of the flesh are manifest, which are, adultery, fornication, &c., whereof I tell you before, as also I have told you that they which do such things, shall not inherit the kingdom of God.'

Hereby we may see who be very saints indeed. They be not stocks and stones (as the monks and schoolmen dream) so that they are never moved with anything, never feel any lust or desires of the flesh: but, as Paul saith, their flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and

**The whole Church, which indeed is holy, prayeth that her sins may be forgiven her, and believeth the forgiveness of sins.**

therefore they have sin and can sin. And the thirty-second Psalm witnesseth, that the saints do confess their unrighteousness, and pray that the wickedness of their sin may be forgiven, where it saith: 'I said, I will confess against myself my wickedness unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. For this shall everyone that is godly, make his prayer unto thee,' &c. Moreover the whole Church, which indeed is holy, prayeth that her sins may be forgiven her, and believeth the forgiveness of sins. And in the cxliii. Psalm, David prayeth: 'O Lord enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight shall none that liveth be justified.' And in Psalm cxxx: 'If thou, O Lord, shouldest straitly mark iniquities, Lord who shall stand? But with thee is mercy,' &c. Thus do the chiefest saints [and children of God] speak and pray: as David, Paul, &c. All the faithful therefore do speak and pray the same thing, and with the same spirit. The popish sophisters read not the Scriptures, or if they read them they have a veil before their eyes: and therefore as they cannot judge rightly of anything, so can they not judge rightly either of sin or of holiness.



# Bunyan on Romans 7

*Editorial Note:* The Puritans seemed to be united in following the Reformers' interpretation of Romans 7. And if anyone thinks that this interpretation encourages laxity in sanctification, let it be remembered that the Puritans made a name for themselves in being some of the most rigorous and thorough exponents of sanctification which the world has ever seen.

In his famous allegory, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, John Bunyan includes a character named Faithful. This Christian pilgrim gives a beautiful insight into Romans 7:14-25. Faithful obeys his conscience and the law of God. His victory over the "old man" is commendable—typical of a Christian successfully overcoming temptation. Yet Bunyan illustrates how such obedience cannot of itself satisfy the law.

*Christian.* Well, neighbour Faithful, said Christian. . . . Tell me now, what you have met with in the way as you came; for I know you have met with some things, or else it may be writ for a wonder.

*Faithful.* I escaped the Slough that I perceived you fell into, and got up to the gate without that danger.

*Christian.* Did you meet with no assault as you came?

*Faithful.* When I came to the foot of the hill called Difficulty, I met with a very aged man, who asked me what I was, and whither bound. I told him that I am a pilgrim, going to the Celestial City. Then said the old man, Thou lookest like an honest fellow; wilt thou be content to dwell with me for the wages that I shall give thee? Then I asked him his name, and where he dwelt. He said his name was Adam the First, and that he dwelt in the town of Deceit. I asked him then, what was his work, and what the wages that he would give. He told me, that his work was many delights; and his wages, that I should be his heir at last. I further asked him, what house he kept, and what other servants he had. So he told me, that his house was maintained with all the dainties in the world; and that his servants were those of his own begetting. Then I asked how many children he had. He said that he had but three daughters; the Lust of Flesh, the Lust of the Eyes, and the Pride of Life, and that I should marry them all if I would. Then I asked how long time he would have me live with him? And he told me, As long as he lived himself.

*Christian.* Well, and what conclusion came the old man and you to, at last?

*Faithful.* Why, at first, I found myself somewhat



inclinable to go with the man, for I thought he spake very fair; but looking in his forehead, as I talked with him, I saw there written, "Put off the old man with his deeds."

*Christian.* And how then?

*Faithful.* Then it came burning hot in my mind, whatever he said, and however he flattered, when he got me home to his house, he would sell me for a slave. So I bid him forbear to talk, for I would not come near the door of the house. Then he reviled me, and told me, that he would send such a one after me, that should make my way bitter to my soul. So I turned to go away from him; but just as I turned myself to go thence, I felt him take hold of my flesh and give me such a deadly twitch back that I thought he had pulled part of me after himself. This made me cry, "O wretched man!" So I went on my way up the hill.

Now when I had got about half way up, I looked behind, and saw one coming after me, swift as the wind; so he overtook me just about the place where the settle stands.

*Christian.* Just there, said Christian, did I sit down

to rest me; but being overcome with sleep, I there lost this roll out of my bosom.

*Faithful.* But, good brother, hear me out. So soon as the man overtook me, he was but a word and a blow, for down he knocked me, and laid me for dead. But when I was a little come to myself again, I asked him wherefore he served me so. He said, because of my secret inclining to Adam the First; and with that he struck me another deadly blow on the breast, and beat me down backward; so I lay at his foot as dead as before. So, when I came to myself again, I cried him mercy; but he said, I know not how to show mercy; and with that knocked me down again. He had doubtless made an end of me, but that one came by, and bid him forbear.

*Christian.* Who was that that bid him forbear?

*Faithful.* I did not know him at first, but as he went by, I perceived the holes in his hands, and in his side; then I concluded that he was our Lord. So I went up the hill.

*Christian.* That man that overtook you was Moses. He spareth none, neither knoweth he how to show mercy to those that transgress his law.



The whole body of ancient Christians declare with one voice that even believers in Christ have need to “wrestle with flesh and blood,” with an evil nature, as well as “with principalities and powers.”

“If any man be in Christ he is a new creature” (2 Cor. v. 17).

I. Is there then sin in him that is in Christ? Does sin *remain* in one that believes in Him? Is there any sin in them that are born of God, or are they wholly delivered from it? Let no one imagine this to be a question of mere curiosity; or, that it is of little importance whether it be determined one way or the other. Rather, it is a point of the utmost moment to every serious Christian, the resolving of which very nearly concerns both his present and eternal happiness.

And yet I do not know that ever it was controverted in the primitive church. Indeed there was no room for disputing concerning it, as all Christians were agreed. And so far as I have ever observed, the whole body of ancient Christians, who have left us anything in writing, declare with one voice that even believers in Christ, till they are “strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might,” have need to “wrestle with flesh and blood,” with an evil nature, as well as “with principalities and powers.”

And herein our own church (as indeed in most points) exactly copies after the primitive; declaring in her ninth article, “Original sin is the corruption of the nature of every man, whereby every man is in his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth contrary to the Spirit. And this infection of nature doth remain, yea in them that are regenerated; whereby the lust of the flesh is not subject to the law of God. And although there is no condemnation for them that believe, yet this lust hath of itself the nature of sin.”

The testimony is given by all other churches; not only by the Greek and Romish churches; but by every reformed church in Europe, of whatever denomination. Indeed some of these seem to carry the thing too far; so describing the corruption of heart in a believer, as scarce to allow that he has dominion over it, but rather is in bondage thereto; and by this means, they leave hardly any distinction between a believer and an unbeliever.

To avoid this extreme, many well meaning men, particularly those under the direction of the late Count



## Sin in Believers

John Wesley

*Editorial Note:* Although Wesley only makes one brief mention of Romans 7 in this sermon, the whole tenor of his presentation is in harmony with Luther and Calvin. Did Wesley change his mind on Romans 7? We may remember that Luther at first had a poor opinion of the Epistle of James. But after he had his conflict with the antinomians, it seemed that Luther changed his opinion and found James very useful. Did something similar happen with Wesley?

There are two things which Scripture continually exhorts us to do: it exhorts us to continually overcome (making no excuses for sin), and it exhorts us to continually confess that we are sinners. This is not a case of either/or. It must be both. If a man thinks that he can *confess* without also *overcoming*, he is on the wrong road. So is the man who thinks that he can so *overcome* that he does not need to keep *confessing* his sinnerhood. As did Luther in his comments on Galatians 5:17, Wesley tries to maintain this tension.

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Reprinted from John Wesley, *Sermons on Several Occasions*, Sermon XIII.



Zinzendorf, ran into another, affirming that "all true believers are not only saved from the *dominion* of sin, but from the *being* of inward as well as outward sin, so that it no longer *remains* in them." And from them, about twenty years ago, many of our countrymen imbibed the same opinion, that even corruption *is no more* in those who believe in Christ.

It is true that when the Germans were pressed upon this head, they soon allowed, (many of them, at least,) that "sin did still remain *in the flesh*, but not *in the heart* of a believer"; and after a time, when the absurdity of this was shown, they fairly gave up the point, allowing that sin did still remain, though not reign, in him that is born of God.

But the English, who had received it from them, (some directly, some at second or third hand,) were not easily prevailed upon to part with a favorite opinion; and even when the generality of them were convinced it was utterly indefensible, a few could not be persuaded to give it up, but maintain it to this day.

II. For the sake of those who really fear God, and desire to know "the truth as it is in Jesus," it may not be amiss to consider the point with calmness and impartiality. In this, I use indifferently the words, *regenerate*, *justified*, or *believers*; since, though they have not precisely the same meaning, (the first implying an inward, actual change, the second a relative one, and

the third the means whereby both the one and the other wrought) yet they come to one and the same thing, as every one that believes is both justified and born of God.

By sin, I here understand inward sin, any sinful temper, passion or affection, such as pride, self-will, love of the world, in any kind or degree, such as lust, anger, peevishness, any disposition contrary to the mind which was in Christ.

The question is not concerning *outward sin*, whether a child of God *commit sin* or no. We all agree and earnestly maintain, "He that committeth sin is of the devil." We agree, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin." Neither do we now inquire whether inward sin will *always* remain in the children of God; whether sin will continue in the soul, as long as it continues in the body; nor yet do we inquire whether a justified person may *relapse* either into inward or outward sin; but simply this: Is a justified or regenerated man freed from *all* sin as soon as he is justified? Is there then no sin in his heart?—nor ever after, unless he fall from grace?

We allow that the state of a justified person is inexpressibly great and glorious. He is born again, "not of blood, nor of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." He is a child of God, a member of Christ, an heir of the kingdom of heaven. "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keepeth his heart and mind in Christ Jesus." His very body is a "temple of the Holy Ghost,"

Paul is speaking to believers, and describing the state of believers in general, when he says, “The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: these are contrary one to the other” (Gal. v. 17).

and a “habitation of God through the Spirit.” He is “created anew in Christ Jesus;” he is *washed*, he is *sanctified*. His heart is purified by faith; he is cleansed “from the corruption that is in the world;” “the love of God is shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto him.” And so long as he “walketh in love,” (which he may always do) he worships God in spirit and in truth. He keepeth the commandments of God, and doeth those things that are pleasing in His sight; so exercising himself as to “have a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man”; and he has power both over outward and inward sin, even from the moment he is justified.

III. But was he not then freed from all sin, so that there is no sin in his heart? I cannot say this; I cannot believe it; because Paul says to the contrary. He is speaking to believers, and describing the state of believers in general, when he says, “The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: these are contrary one to the other” (Gal. v. 17). Nothing can be more express. The apostle here directly affirms that the flesh, evil nature, opposes the Spirit, even in believers; that even in the regenerate, there are two principles, “contrary one to the other.”

Again: when he writes to the believers at Corinth, to those who were sanctified in Christ Jesus, (1 Cor. i: 2), he says, “I, brethren, could not speak unto you, as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto babes in Christ. Ye are yet carnal; for whereas there is among you envying and strife, are ye not carnal?” (ch. iii. vers. 1-3). Now here the apostle speaks unto those who were unquestionably believers,—whom in the same breath he styles his brethren in Christ, as being still, in a measure, carnal. He affirms, there was envying (an evil temper), occasioning strife among them, and yet does not give the least intimation that they had lost their faith. Nay, he manifestly declares they had not; for then they would not have been babes in Christ. And (what is most remarkable of all) he speaks of being carnal, and babes in Christ, as one and the same thing; plainly showing that every believer is (in a degree) carnal, while he is only a babe in Christ.

Indeed, this grand point, that there are two contrary principles in believers, nature and grace, the flesh and

the Spirit, runs through the epistles of St. Paul, yea, through all the Holy Scriptures; almost all the directions and exhortations therein, are founded on this supposition, pointing at wrong tempers or practices in those who are, notwithstanding, acknowledged by the inspired writers to be believers. And they are continually exhorted to fight with and to conquer these, by the power of the faith which was in them.

And who can doubt that there was faith in the angel of the church of Ephesus, when our Lord said to him, “I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience: thou hast patience, and for my name’s sake hast labored and hast not fainted” (Rev. ii. 2-4). But was there, meantime, no sin in his heart? Yea, or Christ would not have added, “Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.” This was a real sin which God saw in his heart; of which, accordingly, he is exhorted to *repent*; and yet we have no authority to say that even then he had no faith.

Nay, the angel of the church at Pergamos, also, is exhorted to *repent*, which implies sin, though our Lord expressly says, “Thou hast not denied my faith” (v. 13-16.) And to the angel of the church in Sardis, he says, “Strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die.” The good which remained was *ready to die*; but was not equally dead (chap. iii. 2.) So there was still a spark of faith even in him; which he is accordingly commanded to *hold fast* (ver. 3.)

Once more: when the apostle exhorts believers to “cleanse themselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit” (2 Cor. vii. 1) he plainly teaches that those believers were not yet cleansed therefrom.

Will you answer, “He that abstains from all appearance of evil,” does *ipso facto* “cleanse themselves from all filthiness.” Not in any wise. For instance: a man reviles me; I feel resentment, which is filthiness of spirit; yet I say not a word. Here I “abstain from all appearance of evil”; but this does not cleanse me from that filthiness of spirit, as I experience to my sorrow.

And as this position, there is no sin in a believer,

**This grand point, that there are two contrary principles in believers, nature and grace, the flesh and the Spirit, runs through the epistles of St. Paul, yea, through all the Holy Scriptures.**



As the position that there is no sin in a believer, no carnal mind, no bent to backsliding, is contrary to the word of God, so it is to the experience of his children.

no carnal mind, no bent to backsliding, is thus contrary to the word of God, so it is to the experience of his children. These continually feel a heart bent to backsliding, a natural tendency to evil, a proneness to depart from God, and cleave to the things of earth. They are daily sensible of sin remaining in the heart, pride, self-will, unbelief; and of sin cleaving to all they speak or do, even their best actions and holiest duties. Yet at the same time they "know that they are of God"; they cannot doubt it for a moment. They feel his Spirit clearly "witnessing with their spirit, that they are the children of God." They "rejoice in God through Christ Jesus, by whom they have now received the atonement." So that they are equally assured, that sin is in them, and that "Christ is in them the hope of glory."

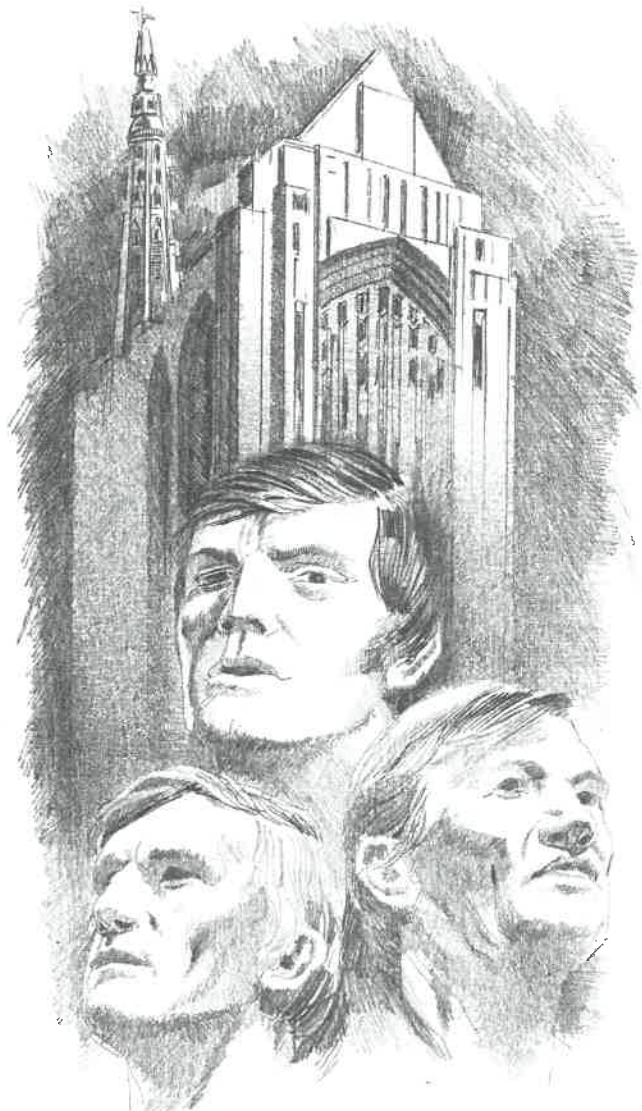
"But can Christ be in the same heart where sin is?" Undoubtedly he can. Otherwise it never could be saved therefrom. Where the sickness is, there is the physician,

"Carrying on His work within,  
Striving till He cast out sin."

Christ indeed cannot *reign* where sin reigns; neither will He *dwell* where any sin is *allowed*. But He *is* and *dwells* in the heart of every believer who is *fighting against* all sin; although it be not yet purified, according to the purification of the sanctuary.

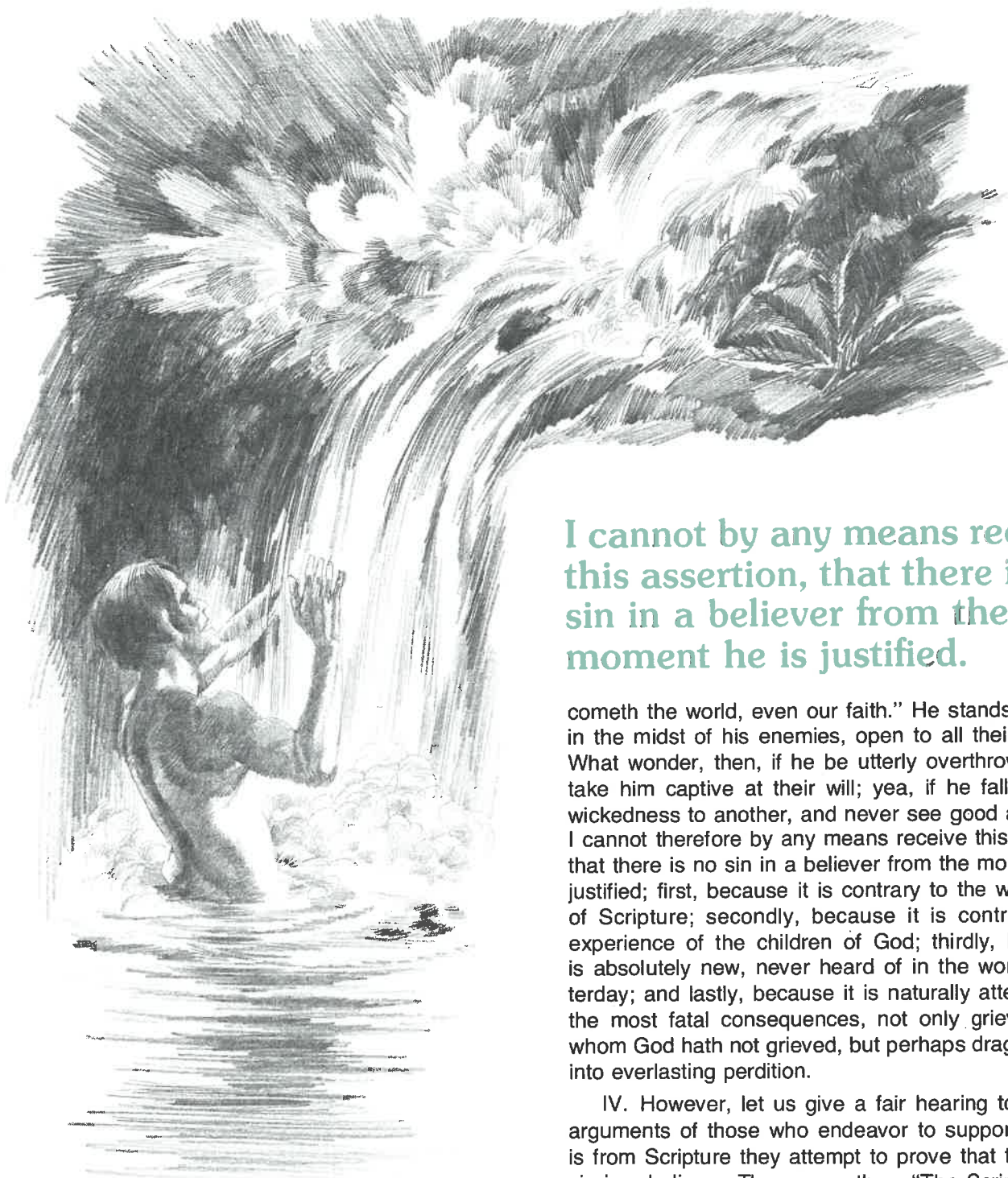
It has been observed before that the opposite doctrine, that there is no sin in believers, is quite new in the church of Christ; that it was never heard of for seventeen hundred years; never till it was discovered by Count Zinzendorf. I do not remember to have seen the least intimation of it, either in any ancient or modern writer; unless, perhaps, in some of the wild, ranting Antinomians. And these likewise say and unsay, acknowledging there is sin *in their flesh*, although no *sin in the heart*. But whatever doctrine is *new* must be *wrong*; for the *old* religion is the only *true* one; and no doctrine can be right, unless it is the very same "which was from the beginning."

One argument more against this new, unscriptural doctrine may be drawn from the dreadful consequences of it. One says, "I felt anger to-day." Must I reply, "Then you have no faith"? Another says, "I know what you advise is good, but my will is quite averse to it." Must I tell him, "Then you are an unbeliever, under the wrath



Christ indeed cannot reign where sin reigns; neither will He dwell where any sin is allowed. But He is and dwells in the heart of every believer who is fighting against all sin.

and the curse of God"? What will be the natural consequence of this? Why, if he believe what I say, his soul will not only be grieved and wounded, but perhaps utterly destroyed; inasmuch as he will "cast away" that "confidence which hath great recompense of reward"; and having cast away his shield, how shall he "quench the fiery darts of the wicked one"? How shall he "overcome the world"?—seeing "this is the victory that over-



**I cannot by any means receive this assertion, that there is no sin in a believer from the moment he is justified.**

cometh the world, even our faith." He stands disarmed in the midst of his enemies, open to all their assaults. What wonder, then, if he be utterly overthrown; if they take him captive at their will; yea, if he fall from one wickedness to another, and never see good any more? I cannot therefore by any means receive this assertion, that there is no sin in a believer from the moment he is justified; first, because it is contrary to the whole tenor of Scripture; secondly, because it is contrary to the experience of the children of God; thirdly, because it is absolutely new, never heard of in the world till yesterday; and lastly, because it is naturally attended with the most fatal consequences, not only grieving those whom God hath not grieved, but perhaps dragging them into everlasting perdition.

IV. However, let us give a fair hearing to the chief arguments of those who endeavor to support it. And it is from Scripture they attempt to prove that there is no sin in a believer. They argue thus: "The Scripture says, Every believer is born of God, is clean, is holy, is sanctified, is pure in heart, has a new heart, is a temple of the Holy Ghost. Now, as 'that which is born of the flesh is flesh,' is altogether evil, so 'that which is born of the Spirit is spirit,' is altogether good. Again: a man cannot be clean, sanctified, holy, and at the same time unclean, unsanctified, unholy. He cannot be pure and impure, or have a new and an old heart together. Neither can his



soul be unholy while it is a temple of the Holy Ghost."

I have put this objection as strong as possible, that its full weight may appear. Let us now examine it, part by part. And, 1. "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit" is altogether good." I allow the text, but not the comment. For the text affirms this, and no more, That every man who is "born of the Spirit" is a spiritual man. He is so. But so he may be, and yet not be altogether spiritual. The Christians at Corinth were spiritual men, else they had been no Christians at all; and yet they were not altogether spiritual; they were still, in part, carnal. "But they were fallen from grace." St. Paul says no. They were even then babes in Christ. 2. "But a man cannot be clean, sanctified, holy, and at the same time unclean, unsanctified, unholy." Indeed he may. So the Corinthians were. "Ye are washed," says the apostle, "ye are sanctified"; namely, cleansed from "fornication, idolatry, drunkenness," and all other outward sin (1 Cor. vi. 9, 10, 11); and yet, at the same time, in another sense of the word, they were unsanctified; they were not washed, not inwardly cleansed from envy, evil surmising, partiality. "But sure they had not a new heart and an old heart together." It is most sure they had, for at that very time their hearts were *truly*, yet not entirely renewed. Their carnal mind was nailed to the cross, yet it was not wholly destroyed. "But could they be unholy while they were 'temples of the Holy Ghost'?" Yes; that they were temples of the Holy Ghost is certain (1 Cor. vi. 19), and it is equally certain they were in some degree carnal, that is, unholy.

"However, there is one Scripture more which will put the matter out of question: 'If any man be (a believer) in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things are passed away; behold all things are become new' (2 Cor. v. 17). Now certainly a man cannot be a new creature and an old creature at once." Yes, he may; he may be partly renewed, which was the very case with those at Corinth. They were doubtless "renewed in the spirit of their mind," or they could not have been so much as "babes in Christ"; yet they had not the whole mind which was in Christ, for they *envied* one another. "But it is said expressly, 'Old things are passed away; all things are become new.'" But we must not so interpret the apostle's words as to make him contradict himself. And if we will make him consistent with himself, the plain meaning of the words is this: His old judgment concerning justification, holiness, happiness, indeed, concerning the things of God in general, is now passed away; so are his old desires, designs, affections, tempers, and conversation. All these are undeniably become new, greatly changed from what they were. And yet, though they are new, they are not wholly new. Still he feels, to his sorrow and shame, remains of the "old man," too manifest taints of his former tempers and affections, though they cannot gain any advantage over him as long as he watches unto prayer.



## Sin remains, though it does not reign.

This whole argument, "If he is holy, he is holy" (and twenty more expressions of the same kind may easily be heaped together), is really no better than playing upon words; it is the fallacy of arguing from a *particular* to a *general*; of inferring a conclusion from particular premises. Propose the sentence entire and it runs thus: "If he is holy *at all*, he is holy *altogether*." That does not follow; every babe in Christ is holy, and yet not altogether so. He is saved from sin, yet not entirely; it *remains*, though it does not *reign*. If you think it does not *remain* (in babes, at least, whatever be the case with young men or fathers), you certainly have not considered the height, and depth, and length, and breadth of the law of God (even the law of love laid down by St. Paul in the thirteenth of Corinthians), and that *every* disconformity to, or deviation from this law, *is sin*. Now is there no disconformity to this in the heart or life of a believer?





## That believers are delivered from the guilt and power of sin we allow; that they are delivered from the being of it we deny.

What may be in an adult Christian is another question; but what a stranger must he be to human nature who can possibly imagine that this is the case with every babe in Christ?

"But believers walk after the Spirit (Romans viii. 1) and the Spirit of God dwells in them; consequently they are delivered from the guilt and power, or in one word, the being of sin."

These are coupled together as if they were the same thing. But they are not the same thing. The *guilt* is one thing, the *power* another, and the *being* yet another. That believers are delivered from the *guilt* and *power* of sin we allow; that they are delivered from the *being* of it we deny. Nor does it in any wise follow from these texts. A man may have the Spirit of God dwelling in him, and may "walk after the Spirit," though he still feels "the flesh lusting against the Spirit."

"But the 'Church is the body of Christ' (Col. i. 24); this implies that its members are washed from all filthiness; otherwise it will follow that Christ and Belial are

incorporated with each other."

Nay, it will not follow from hence, "Those who are the mystical body of Christ still feel the flesh lusting against the Spirit," that Christ has any fellowship with the devil, or with that sin which he enables them to resist and overcome.

"But are not Christians 'come to the heavenly Jerusalem,' where 'nothing defiled can enter'?" (Heb. xii. 22). Yes; "and to an innumerable company of angels, and to the spirits of just men made perfect"; that is,

"Earth and heaven all agree,  
All in one great family."

And they are likewise holy and undefiled while they "walk after the Spirit," although sensible there is another principle in them, and that "these are contrary to each other."

"But Christians are reconciled to God. Now this could not be if any of the carnal mind remained, for this is enmity against God; consequently, no reconciliation can be effected but by its total destruction."

We are "reconciled to God through the blood of the cross," and in that moment the corruption of nature, which is enmity with God, is put under our feet; the flesh has no more dominion over us. But it still *exists*; and it is still in its nature enmity with God, lusting against his Spirit.

"But 'they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with its affections and lusts'" (Gal. v. 24). They have so, yet it remains in them still, and often struggles to break from the cross. "Nay, but they have 'put off the old man with his deeds'" (Col. iii. 9). They have, and in the sense above described, "old things are passed away; all things are become new." A hundred texts may be cited to the same effect, and they will all admit of the same answer. "But to say all in one word, 'Christ gave himself for the Church, that it might be holy and without blemish'" (Eph. v. 25-27). And so it will be in the end; but it never was yet, from the beginning to this day.

"But let experience speak; all who are justified do at that time find an absolute freedom from all sin." That I doubt; but if they do, do they find it ever after? Else you gain nothing. "If they do not, it is their own fault." That remains to be proved.

"But in the very nature of things, can a man have pride in him and not be proud; anger, and yet not be angry?"

A man may have *pride* in him, may think of himself in some particulars above what he ought to think (and so be proud in that particular), and yet not be a proud man in his general character. He may have *anger* in him, yea, and a strong propensity to furious anger, without *giving* way to it. "But can anger and pride be in that heart where *only* meekness and humility are felt?" No; but *some* pride and anger may be in that heart where



there is much humility and meekness.

"It avails not to say, these tempers are there, but they do not *reign*; for sin cannot, in any kind or degree, exist where it does not reign; for *guilt* and *power* are essential properties of sin. Therefore, where one of them is, all must be."

Strange indeed! "Sin cannot, in any kind or degree, exist where it does not *reign*." Absolutely contrary, this, to all experience, all Scripture, all common sense. Resentment of an affront is sin; it is disconformity to the law of love. This has existed in me a thousand times; yet it did not and does not *reign*. "But *guilt* and *power* are essential properties of sin; therefore where one is all must be." No; in the instance before us, if the resentment I feel is not yielded to, even for a moment, there is no guilt at all, no condemnation from God upon that account. And in this case it has no *power*; though it lusteth against the Spirit, it cannot prevail. Here, there-

**The supposing sin is in us does not imply that it has the possession of our strength, any more than a man crucified has the possession of those that crucify him.**

fore, as in ten thousand instances, there is *sin* without either *guilt* or *power*.

"But the supposing sin in a believer is pregnant with everything frightful and discouraging. It implies the contending with a power that has the possession of our strength, maintains his usurpation of our hearts, and there prosecutes the war in defiance of our Redeemer." Not so; the supposing sin is in us does not imply that it has the possession of our strength, any more than a man crucified has the possession of those that crucify him. As little does it imply that "sin maintains its usurpation of our hearts." The usurper is dethroned; he remains indeed where he once reigned, but remains *in chains*. So that he does, in some sense, "prosecute the war," yet he grows weaker and weaker, while the believer goes on from strength to strength, conquering and to conquer.

"I am not satisfied yet; he that hath sin in him is a slave to sin. Therefore you suppose a man to be justified while he is a slave to sin. Now if you allow men may be justified while they have pride, anger, or unbelief in them; nay, if you aver, these are (at least for a time) in all that are justified, what wonder that we have so many proud, angry, unbelieving believers?"

I do not suppose any man who is justified is a slave to sin, yet I do suppose sin remains (at least for a time) in all that are justified.

"But if sin remains in a believer, he is a sinful man; if pride, for instance, then he is proud; if self-will, then

he is self-willed; if unbelief, then he is an unbeliever; consequently, no believer at all. How, then, does he differ from unbelievers, from unregenerate men?" This is still mere playing with words. It means no more than if there is sin, pride, self-will in him, then—there is sin, pride, self-will. And this nobody can deny. In that sense, then, he is proud or self-willed. But he is not proud or self-willed in the same sense that unbelievers are, that is, *governed* by pride or self-will. They *obey* sin, he does not. Flesh is in them both, but they *walk after the flesh*; he *walks after the Spirit*.

"But how can *unbelief* be in a believer?" That word has two meanings. It means either no faith, or little faith; either the *absence* of faith or the *weakness* of it. In the former sense, unbelief is not in a believer; in the latter, it is in all babes. Their faith is commonly mixed with doubt or fear, that is, in the latter sense, with unbelief. "Why are ye fearful (says the Lord), oh ye of little faith?" Again, "Oh thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" You see here was *unbelief* in *believers*; little faith and much unbelief.

"But this doctrine, that sin remains in a believer, that a man may be in the favor of God while he has sin in his heart, certainly tends to encourage men in sin." Understand the proposition right, and no such consequence follows. A man may be in God's favor though he feel sin, but not if he *yield* to it. *Having sin* does not forfeit the favor of God; *giving way to sin* does. Though the flesh in you "lust against the Spirit," you may still be a child of God; but if you "walk after the flesh" you are a child of the devil. Now this doctrine does not encourage to *obey* sin, but to resist it with all your might.

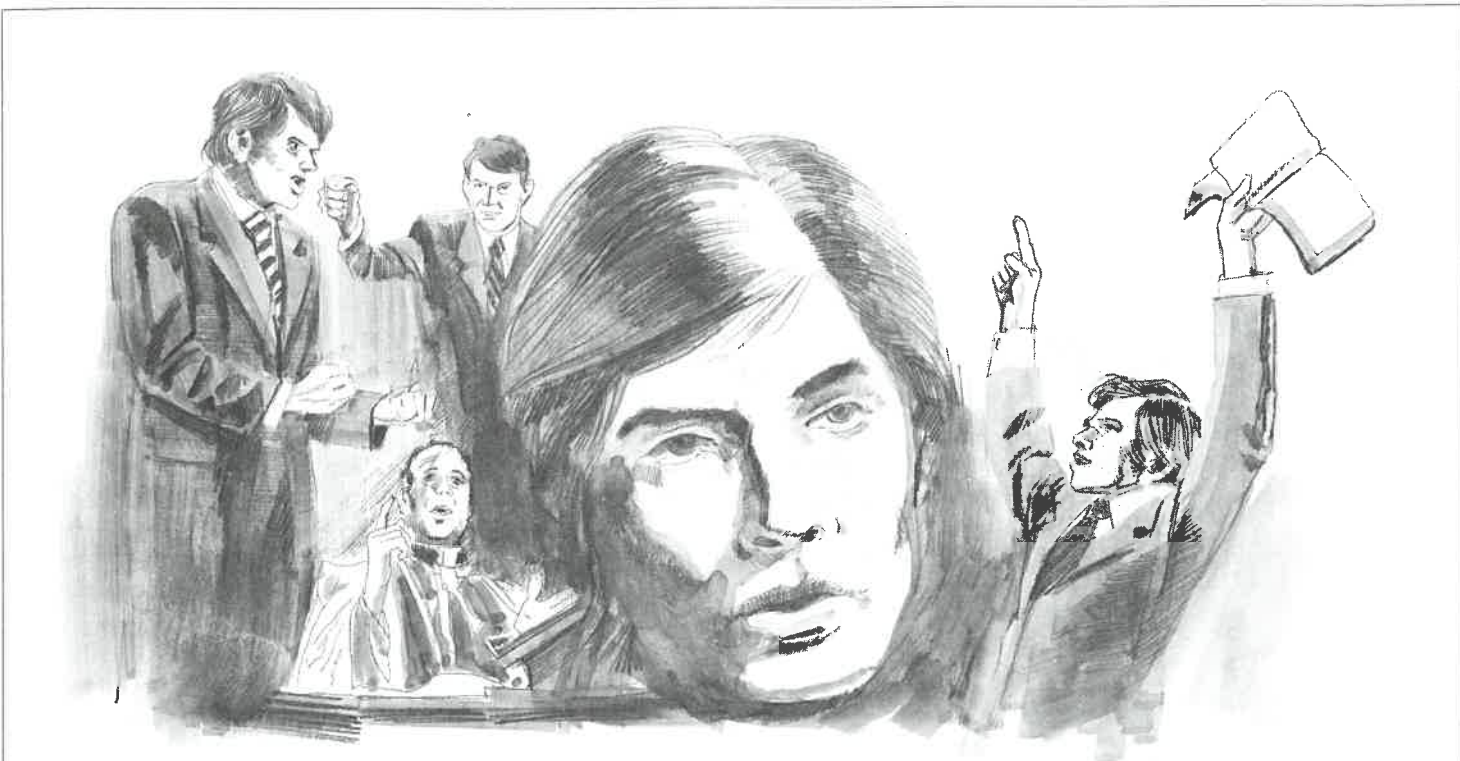
V. The sum of all this: There are in every person, even after he is justified, two contrary principles, nature and grace, termed by St. Paul, the *flesh* and the *Spirit*. Hence, though even babes in Christ are *sanctified*, yet it is only in part. In a degree, according to the measure of their faith, they are spiritual; yet, in a degree, they are carnal. Accordingly, believers are continually exhorted to watch against the flesh, as well as the world and the devil. And to this agrees the constant experi-

ence of the children of God. While they feel the witness in themselves, they feel a will not wholly resigned to the will of God. They know they are in Him, and yet find a heart ready to depart from Him, a proneness to evil in many instances, and a backwardness to that which is good. The contrary doctrine is wholly new—never heard of in the Church of Christ, from the time of His coming into the world, till the time of Count Zinzendorf; and it is attended with the most fatal consequence. It cuts off all watching against our evil nature, against the Delilah which we are told is gone, though she is still lying in our bosom. It tears away the shield of weak believers, deprives them of their faith, and so leaves them exposed to all the assaults of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Let us, therefore, hold fast the sound doctrine "once delivered to the saints," and delivered down by them, with the written word, to all succeeding generations; that although we are renewed, cleansed, purified, sanctified, the moment we truly believe in Christ, yet we are not then renewed, cleansed, purified altogether; but the flesh, the evil nature, still remains, though subdued, and wars against the Spirit. So much the more let us use all diligence in "fighting the good fight of faith." So much the more earnestly let us "watch and pray" against the enemy within. The more carefully let us take to ourselves, and "put on the whole armor of God," that, although "we wrestle" both "with flesh and blood, and with principalities, and powers, and wicked spirits in high places," we "may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."

**Though the flesh in you "lust against the Spirit," you may still be a child of God; but if you "walk after the flesh" you are a child of the devil.**





## Spurgeon Disagrees with Primitive Methodists

Personally, I have to bless God for many good books; I thank Him for Dr. Doddridge's *Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*; for Baxter's *Call to the Unconverted*; for Alleine's *Alarm to Unconverted Sinners*; and for James' *Anxious Enquirer*, but my gratitude most of all is due to God, not for books, but for the preached Word—and that too addressed to me by a poor, uneducated man, a man who had never received any training for the ministry, and probably will never be heard of in this life, a man engaged in business, no doubt of a humble kind, during the week, but who had just enough of grace to say on the Sabbath, "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." The books were good, but the man was better. The revealed Word awakened me, but it was the preached Word that saved me; and I must ever attach peculiar value to the *hearing of the truth*, for by it I received the joy and peace in which my soul delights. While under concern of soul, I resolved that I would attend all the places of worship in the town where I lived, in order that I might find out the way of salvation. I was willing to do anything, and be anything, if God would only forgive my sin. I set off, determined to go round to all the chapels, and I

did go to every place of worship; but for a long time I went in vain. I do not, however, blame the ministers. One man preached Divine Sovereignty; I could hear him with pleasure, but what was that sublime truth to a poor sinner who wished to know what he must do to be saved? There was another admirable man who always preached about the law, but what was the use of ploughing up ground that needed to be sown? Another was a practical preacher. I heard him, but it was very much like a commanding officer teaching the manoeuvres of war to a set of men without feet. What could I do? All his exhortations were lost on me. I knew it was said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," but I did not know what it was to believe on Christ. These good men all preached truths suited to many in their congregations who were spiritually-minded people, but what I wanted to know was, "How can I get my sins forgiven?"—and they never told me that. I desired to hear how a poor sinner, under a sense of sin, might find peace with God, and when I went, I heard a sermon on, "Be not deceived, God is not mocked," which cut me up still worse, but did not bring me into rest. I went again, another day, and the text was something about the glories of the righteous; nothing for poor me! I was like a dog under the table, not allowed to eat of the children's food. I went time after time, and I can

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honestly say that I do not know that I ever went without prayer to God, and I am sure there was not a more attentive hearer than myself in all the place, for I panted and longed to understand how I might be saved.

I sometimes think I might have been in darkness and despair until now had it not been for the goodness of God in sending a snowstorm, one Sunday morning, while I was going to a certain place of worship. When I could go no further, I turned down a side street, and came to a little Primitive Methodist Chapel. In that chapel there may have been a dozen or fifteen people. I had heard of the Primitive Methodists, how they sang so loudly that they made people's heads ache; but that did not matter to me. I wanted to know how I might be saved, and if they could tell me that, I did not care how much they made my head ache. The minister did not come that morning; he was snowed up, I suppose. At last, a very thin-looking man, a shoemaker, or tailor,

or something of that sort, went up into the pulpit to preach. Now, it is well that preachers should be instructed, but this man was really stupid. He was obliged to stick to his text, for the simple reason that he had little else to say. The text was—

“Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.”

He did not even pronounce the words rightly, but that did not matter. There was, I thought, a glimpse of hope for me in that text. The preacher began thus: “My dear friends, this is a very simple text indeed. It says, ‘Look.’ Now lookin’ don’t take a deal of pain. It ain’t liftin’ your foot or your finger; it is just, ‘Look.’ Well, a man needn’t go to College to learn to look. You may be the biggest fool, and yet you can look. A man needn’t be worth a thousand a year to be able to look. Anyone can look; even a child can look. But then the text says, ‘Look unto Me.’ Ay!” said he, in broad Essex, “many on ye are lookin’ to yourselves, but it’s no use lookin’ there. You’ll never find any comfort in yourselves. Some look to God the Father. No, look to Him by-and-by. Jesus Christ says, ‘Look unto Me.’ Some on ye say, ‘We must wait for the Spirit’s workin’.’ You have no business with that just now. Look to *Christ*. The text says, ‘Look unto Me.’”

Then the good man followed up his text in this way: “Look unto Me; I am sweatin’ great drops of blood. Look unto Me; I am hangin’ on the cross. Look unto Me; I am dead and buried. Look unto Me; I rise again. Look unto Me; I ascend to Heaven. Look unto Me; I am sittin’ at the Father’s right hand. O poor sinner, look unto Me! look unto Me!”

When he had gone to about that length, and managed to spin out ten minutes or so, he was at the end of his tether. Then he looked at me under the gallery, and I daresay, with so few present, he knew me to be a stranger. Just fixing his eyes on me, as if he knew all my heart, he said, “Young man, you look very miserable.” Well, I did, but I had not been accustomed to have remarks made from the pulpit on my personal appearance before. However, it was a good blow, struck right home. He continued, “and you always will be miserable—miserable in life, and miserable in death—if you don’t obey my text; but if you obey now, this moment, you will be saved.” Then, lifting up his hands, he shouted, as only a Primitive Methodist could do, “Young man, look to Jesus Christ. Look! Look! Look! You have nothin’ to do but to look and live.” I saw at once the way of salvation. I know not what else he said—I did not take much notice of it—I was so possessed with that one thought. Like as when the brazen serpent was lifted up, the people only looked and were healed, so it was with me. I had been waiting to do fifty things, but when I heard that word, “Look!” what a charming word it seemed to me! Oh! I looked until I could almost have looked my eyes away. There and then the cloud was

gone, the darkness had rolled away, and that moment I saw the sun; and I could have risen that instant, and sung with the most enthusiastic of them, of the precious blood of Christ, and the simple faith which looks alone to Him. Oh, that somebody had told me this before, "Trust Christ, and you shall be saved." Yet it was, no doubt, all wisely ordered, and now I can say—

"E'er since by faith I saw the stream  
Thy flowing wounds supply,  
Redeeming love has been my theme,  
And shall be till I die."

\* \* \* \* \*

I think about five days after I first found Christ, when my joy had been such that I could have danced for very mirth at the thought that Christ was mine, on a sudden I fell into a sad fit of despondency. I can tell now why it was so with me. When I first believed in Christ, I am not sure that I thought the devil was dead, but certainly I had a kind of notion that he was so mortally wounded that he could not disturb me. And then I also fancied that the corruption of my nature had received its death-blow. I read what Cowper said—

"Since the dear hour that brought me to Thy foot,  
And cut up all my follies by the root;"

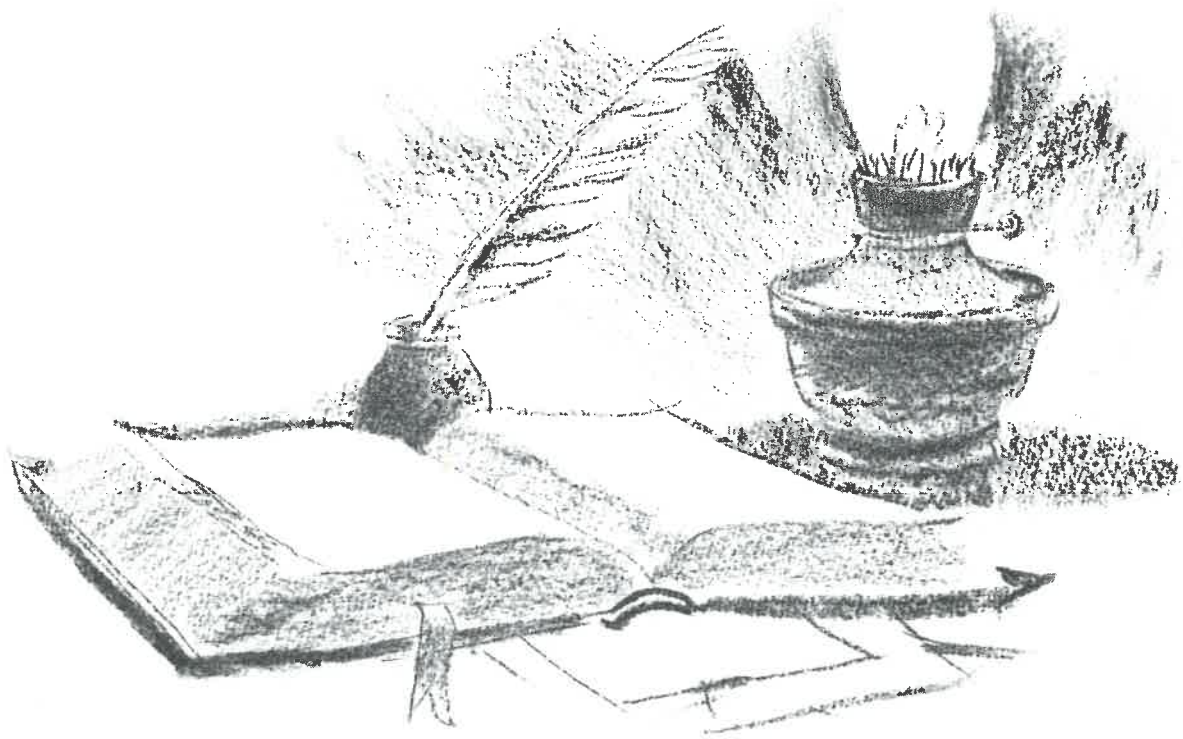
and I really thought that the poet knew what he was saying; whereas, never did anyone blunder so terribly as Cowper did when he said that, for no man, I think, has all his follies thus cut up by the roots. However, I fondly dreamed that mine were, I felt persuaded they would never sprout again. I was going to be perfect—I fully calculated upon it—and lo, I found an intruder I had not reckoned upon, an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. So I went to that same Primitive Methodist Chapel where I first received peace with God, through the simple preaching of the Word. The text happened to be, "O wretched man that I am: who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" "There," I thought, "that's the text for me." I had just got as far as that in the week. I knew that I had put my trust in Christ, and I knew that, when I sat in that house of prayer, my faith was simply and solely fixed on the atonement of the Redeemer. But I had a weight on my mind, because I could not be as holy as I wanted to be. I could not live without sin. When I rose in the morning, I thought I would abstain from every hard word, from every evil thought and look; and I came up to that chapel groaning because, "when I would do good, evil was present with me." The minister began by saying, "Paul was not a believer when he said this." Well now, I knew I was a believer, and it seemed to me from the context that Paul must have been a believer, too. (Now, I am sure he was.) The man went on to say that no child of God

ever did feel any conflict within. So I took up my hat, and left the chapel, and I have very seldom attended such places since. They are very good for people who are unconverted to go to, but of very little use for children of God. That is my notion of Methodism. It is a noble thing to bring in strangers; but a terrible thing for those that are brought in to sit and feed there. It is like the parish pound, it is a good place to put sheep in when they have strayed, but there is no food inside; they had better be let out as soon as possible to find some grass. I saw that that minister understood nothing of experimental divinity, or of practical heart theology, or else he would not have talked as he did. A good man he was, I do not doubt, but utterly incompetent to the task of dealing with a case like mine.

**I was going to be perfect—I fully calculated upon it—and lo, I found an intruder I had not reckoned upon, an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.**

**I had a weight on my mind, because I could not be as holy as I wanted to be. I could not live without sin.**





# The Christian in Romans 7

Arthur W. Pink

In this chapter the apostle does two things: first, he shows what is not and what is the Law's relation to the believer—judicially, the believer is emancipated from the curse or penalty of the Law (7:1-6); morally, the believer is under bonds to obey the Law (vv. 22, 25). Secondly, he guards against a false inference being drawn from what he had taught in chapter 6. In 6:1-11 he sets forth the believer's *identification with Christ* as "dead to sin" (vv. 2, 7, etc.). Then, from v. 11 onwards, he shows the effect this truth should have upon the believer's walk. In chapter 7 he follows the same order of thought. In 7:1-6 he treats of the believer's *identification with Christ* as "dead to the law" (see vv. 4 and 6). Then, from v. 7 onwards he describes the experiences of the Christian. Thus the first half of Rom. 6 and the first half of Rom. 7 deal with the believer's *standing*, whereas the second half of each chapter treats of the believer's *state*; but with this difference: the second half of Rom. 6 reveals what our state *ought* to be, whereas the second half of Rom. 7 (vv. 13-25) shows what our state *actually is*<sup>1</sup>.

Reprinted from Arthur W. Pink, "The Christian in Romans 7."

<sup>1</sup>Vv. 8-12 are more or less in the nature of a parenthesis.

To talk of "getting out of Rom. 7 into Rom. 8" is excuseless folly. Rom. 7 and 8 both apply with undiminished force and pertinence to every believer on earth today.

The controversy which has raged over Rom. 7 is largely the fruitage of the Perfectionism of Wesley and his followers. That brethren, whom we have cause to respect, should have adopted this error in a modified form, only shows how widespread today is the spirit of Laodiceanism. To talk of "getting out of Rom. 7 into Rom. 8" is excuseless folly. Rom. 7 and 8 *both* apply with undiminished force and pertinence to every believer on earth today. The second half of Rom. 7 describes the *conflict* of the two natures in the child of God: it simply sets forth in detail what is summarised in Gal. 5:17. Rom. 7:14, 15, 18, 19, 21 are now true of *every* believer on earth. *Every* Christian falls far, far short of

## Every Christian falls far, far short of the standard set before him—we mean God’s standard, not that of the so-called “victorious life” teachers.

the standard set before him—we mean *God’s* standard, not that of the so-called “victorious life” teachers. If any Christian reader is ready to say that Rom. 7:19 does not describe *his* life, we say in all kindness that he is sadly deceived. We do not mean by this that every Christian breaks the laws of men, or that he is an overt transgressor of the laws of God. But we do mean that his life is far, far below the level of the life our Saviour lived here on earth. We do mean that there is much of “the flesh” still evident in every Christian—not the least in those who make such loud boastings of their spiritual attainments. We do mean that every Christian has urgent need to daily pray for the forgiveness of his daily sins (Luke 11:4), for “in many things we all stumble” (James 3:2, R. V.).

In what follows we shall confine ourselves to the last two verses of Rom. 7, in which we read, “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” (vv. 24, 25).

This is the language of a regenerate soul, and it sums up the contents of the verses immediately preceding. The unregenerate man is wretched indeed, but he is a stranger to the “wretchedness” *here expressed*, for he knows nothing of the experience which evokes this wail. The whole context is devoted to a description of the *conflict* between the two natures in the child of God. “I *delight* in the law of God after the inward man” (v. 22), is true of none but born-again persons. But the one thus “delighting,” discovers “another law in his members.” This reference must not be limited to his physical members, but is to be understood as including all the various parts of his carnal personality. This “other law” is also at work in the memory, the imagination, the will, the heart, etc.

This “other law,” says the apostle, warred *against* the law of his mind (the new nature), and not only so, it brought him “into captivity to the law of sin.” (v. 23). To what *extent* he was brought into “captivity” is not defined. But brought into captivity he was, as is every believer. The wandering of the mind when reading God’s Word, the issuing from the heart (Mark 7:21) of evil thoughts when we are engaged in prayer, the horrid images which sometimes come before us in the sleep state—to name no others—are so many ex-

amples of being “brought into captivity to the law of sin.” “If the evil principle of our nature prevails in exciting one evil thought, it has taken us captive. So far it has conquered and so far are we defeated, and made a prisoner” (Robert Haldane).

It is the consciousness of this *warring* within him and this being brought into captivity to sin, which causes the believer to exclaim, “O wretched man that I am!” This is a cry brought about by a deep realization of indwelling sin. It is the confession of one who *knows* that in his natural man there dwelleth no good thing. It is the mournful plaint of one who has discovered something of the horrible sink of iniquity which is in his own heart. It is the groan of a Divinely-enlightened man who now hates himself—his natural self—and longs for deliverance.

## This moan, “O wretched man that I am,” expresses the normal experience of the Christian, and any Christian who does not so moan is in an ab-normal and un-healthy state spiritually.

This moan, “O wretched man that I am,” expresses the *normal* experience of the Christian, and any Christian who does not so moan is in an *ab-normal* and *un-healthy* state spiritually. The man who does not utter this cry daily is either so out of communion with Christ, or so ignorant of the teachings of Scripture, or so deceived about his actual condition, that he knows not the corruptions of his own heart and the abject failure of his own life.

The one who bows to the solemn and searching teaching of God’s Word, the one who there learns the awful wreckage which sin has wrought in the human constitution, the one who sees the exalted standard of holiness which God has set before us, cannot fail to discover what a vile wretch he is. If he is given to behold how far short he falls of attaining *God’s* standard; if, in the light of the Divine sanctuary, he discovers how little he resembles the Christ of God; then will he find this language most suited to express his godly sorrow. If God reveals to him the coldness of his love, the pride of his heart, the wanderings of his mind, the evil that defiles his godliest acts, he will cry, “O wretched man that I am.” If he is conscious of his ingratitude, of how little he appreciates God’s daily mercies; if he marks the absence of that deep and genuine fervor which ought ever to characterize his praise and worship of that One who is “glorious in holiness;” if he recognizes that sinful spirit of rebellion, which so often causes him

to murmur or at least chafe against the dispensations of God in his daily life; if he attempts to tabulate not only the sins of commission but the sins of omission, of which he is daily guilty, he will indeed cry, "O wretched man that I am."

Nor is it only the "back-slidden" Christian, now convicted, who will mourn thus. The one who is truly *in communion* with Christ, will also emit this groan, and emit it daily and hourly. Yea, the closer he draws to Christ, the more will he discover the corruptions of his old nature, and the more earnestly will he long to be delivered from it. It is not until the sunlight floods a room that the grime and dust are fully revealed. So it is only as we really come into the presence of Him who is *light*, that we are made aware of the filth and wickedness which indwell us, and which defile every part of our being. And such a discovery will *make* each of us cry, "O wretched man that I am!"

"But," inquires some one, "does not communion with Christ produce rejoicing rather than mourning?" We answer, It produces *both*. It did with Paul. In v. 22 of our chapter he says, "I *delight* in the law of God." Yet only two verses later he cries, "O wretched man that I *am!*" Nor does this passage stand alone. In 2 Cor. 6 the same apostle says, "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" (v. 10). *Sorrowful* because of his failures, because of his daily sins. *Rejoicing* because of the grace which still bore with him and because of the blessed provision which God has made even for the sins of His saints. So again in Rom. 8: after declaring, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (v. 1); and after saying, "The Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (vv. 16, 17); the apostle adds, "But ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves *groan* within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body" (v. 23). Similar is the teaching of the apostle Peter, "Wherein ye greatly *rejoice*, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in *heaviness* through manifold temptations" (1 Pet. 1:6). Sorrow and groaning, then, are not absent from the highest spirituality.

In these days of Laodicean complacency and pride, there is considerable talk and much boasting about communion with Christ, but how little *manifestation* of it do we behold! Where there is no sense of our utter unworthiness, where there is no mourning over the total depravity of our nature, where there is no sorrowing over our *lack* of conformity to Christ, where there is no groaning over being brought into captivity to sin; in short, where there is no crying, "O wretched man that I am," it is greatly to be feared that there is no *fellowship with Christ* at all.

When Abraham walked with the Lord he exclaimed, "Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, *which am but dust and ashes*" (Gen. 18:27).

**The closer the believer draws to Christ, the more will he discover the corruptions of his old nature, and the more earnestly will he long to be delivered from it.**

When Job came face to face with God, he said, "*Behold I am vile*" (40:4), and again, "*I abhor myself*" (42:6). When Isaiah entered the Divine presence, he cried, "*Woe is me!* for I am undone; because I *am a man of unclean lips*" (Isa. 6:5). When Daniel had that wondrous vision of Christ (Dan. 10:5, 6) he declared, "There remained no strength in me: for comeliness was turned in me *into corruption*" (v. 8). And in one of the last epistles by the beloved apostle to the Gentiles, we read, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to *save sinners*; of whom *I am chief*" (1 Tim. 1:15). These utterances proceeded not from unregenerate men, but came from the lips of God's saints. Nor were they the confessions of back-slidden believers; rather were they voiced by the most eminent of the Lord's people. Where, today, shall we find any who are fit to be placed alongside of Abraham, Job, Isaiah, Daniel and Paul? Where indeed! And yet, *these* were the men who, as believers, were so conscious of their vileness and unworthiness!

"O wretched man that I am." This then is the language of a regenerate soul. It is the confession of the normal (undeceived and undeluded) Christian. The substance of it may be found not only in the recorded utterances of Old and New Testament saints, but as well, in the writings of the most eminent Christians who have lived during the last five hundred years. Different indeed were the confessions and witnessings borne by eminent saints of the past from the ignorant and arrogant boastings of modern Laodiceans! It is refreshing to turn from the present-day biographies to those written long ago. Ponder the following excerpts:

Mr. Bradford, of holy memory, who was martyred in the reign of bloody queen Mary, in a letter to a fellow-





prisoner in another penitentiary, subscribed himself thus: "The sinful John Bradford: a very painted hypocrite: the most miserable, hard-hearted, and unthankful sinner, John Bradford" (1555 A.D.).

Godly Rutherford wrote, "This body of sin and corruption embitters and poisons our enjoyment. O that I were where I shall sin no more" (A.D. 1650).

Bishop Berkeley wrote, "I cannot pray, but I sin; I cannot preach, but I sin; I cannot administer, nor receive the holy sacrament, but I sin. My very repentance needs to be repented of: and the tears I shed need washing in the blood of Christ" (A.D. 1670).

Jonathan Edwards, in whose home died that remarkable man Mr. David Brainard (the first missionary to the Indians, and whose devotion to Christ was witnessed to by all who knew him), and with whom he was intimately acquainted, says in his "Memoirs of Mr. Brainard," "His religious illuminations, affections, and comfort, seemed to a great degree to be attended with evangelical humiliation; consisting in a sense of his own utter insufficiency, despicableness, and odiousness; with an answering disposition and frame of heart. How deeply affected was he almost continually with his great defects in religion; with his vast distance from that spirituality and holy frame of mind that become a child of God; with his ignorance, pride, deadness, barrenness! He was not only affected with the remembrance of his former sinfulness, before his conversion, but with the sense of his present vileness and pollution. He was not only disposed to think other saints better than he; yea to look on himself as the worst and least of saints; but, very often, as the vilest and worst of mankind."

Jonathan Edwards himself, than whom few men have been more honored of God, either in their spiritual attainments or in the extent to which God has used them in blessing to others, near the end of his life wrote thus: "When I look into my heart and take a view of its wickedness, it looks like an abyss infinitely deeper than hell. And it appears to me, that, were it not for free grace, exalted and raised up to the infinite height of all the fullness and glory of the great Jehovah, I should appear sunk down in my sins below hell itself; far below the sight of everything but the eye of sovereign grace, that alone can pierce down to such a depth. And it is affecting to think how ignorant I was, when a young Christian, (alas, that so many older Christians are still ignorant of it—A. W. P.), of the bottomless depths of wickedness, pride, hypocrisy and deceit left in my heart" (1743 A.D.).

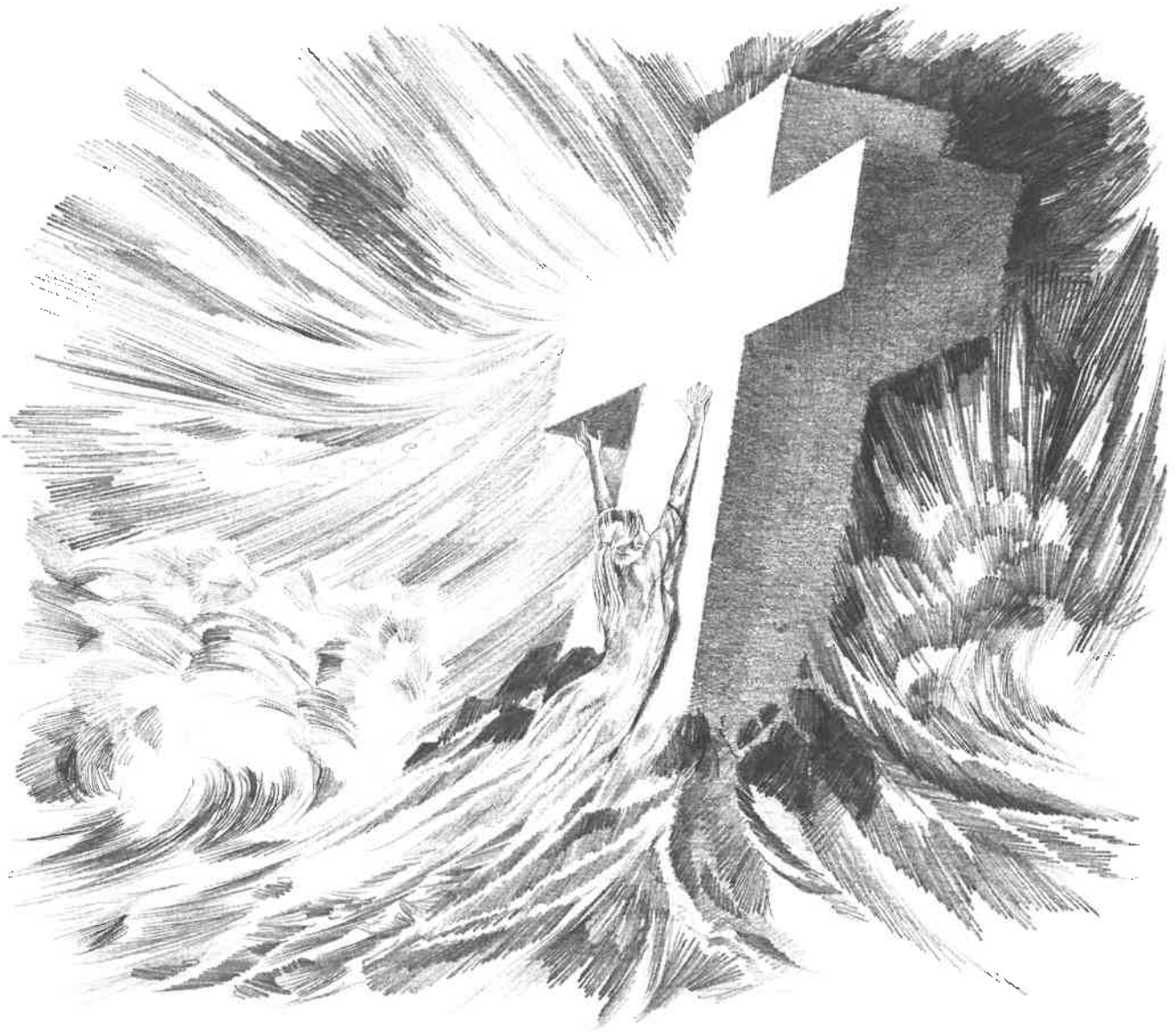
Augustus Toplady, author of "Rock of Ages," wrote thus in his private diary under December 31, 1767— "Upon a review of the past year, I desire to confess that my unfaithfulness has been exceeding great; my sins still greater; God's mercies greater than both." And again, "My shortcomings and my mis-doings, my unbelief and want of love, would sink me into the lowest



hell, was not Jesus my righteousness and my Redeemer."

Listen to the words of that godly woman, the wife of that eminent missionary Adoniram Judson: "O how I rejoice that I am out of the whirlpool! Too gay, too trifling, for a missionary's wife! That may be, but after all, gaiety is my lightest sin. It is my coldness of heart, my listlessness, my want of faith, my spiritual inefficiency and inertness, my love of self, the inherent and every-day pampered sinfulness of my nature, that makes me such a mere infant in the cause of Christ—not the attractions of the world."

John Newton, writer of that blessed hymn, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me; I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see"; when referring to the expectations which he cherished at the outset of his Christian life, wrote thus: "But alas! these my golden expectations have



been like South Sea dreams. I have lived hitherto a poor sinner, and I believe I shall die one. Have I, then, gained nothing? Yes, I have gained that which I once would rather have been without! Such accumulated proof of the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of my heart, as I hope by the Lord's blessing has, in some measure, taught me to know what I mean when I say, Behold, I am vile . . . I was ashamed of myself, when I began to seek it, *I am more ashamed now.*"

James Ingliss (Editor of "Waymarks in the Wilderness") at the close of his life wrote Mr. J. H. Brookes, "As I am brought to take a new view of the end, my life seems so made up of squandered opportunities, and so barren of results, that it is sometimes very painful; but grace comes in to meet it all, and He will be glorified in my humiliation also" (1872). On which Mr. Brookes remarked, "How like him, and how unlike the boastings of those who are glorying in their fancied attainments!"

One more quotation: this time from a sermon by the late C. H. Spurgeon. Said the prince of preachers, "There are some professing Christians who can speak of themselves in terms of admiration; but, from my inmost heart, I loathe such speeches more and more every day that I live. Those who talk in such a boastful fashion must be constituted very differently from me. While they are congratulating themselves, I have to lie humbly at the foot of Christ's Cross, and marvel that I am saved at all, for I know that I am saved. I have to wonder that I do not believe Christ more, and equally wonder that I am privileged to believe in him at all—to wonder that I do not love Him more, and equally to wonder that I love Him at all—to wonder that I am not holier, and equally to wonder that I have any desire to be holy at all considering what a polluted, debased, depraved nature I find still within my soul, notwithstanding all that Divine grace has done in me. If God were



ever to allow the fountains of the great deeps of depravity to break up in the best man that lives, he would make as bad a devil as the Devil himself is. I care nothing for what these boasters say concerning their own perfections; I feel sure that they do not know themselves or they could not talk as they often do. There is tinder enough in the saint who is nearest to heaven to kindle another hell if God should but permit a spark to fall upon it. In the very best of men, there is an infernal and well-nigh infinite depth of depravity. Some Christians never seem to find this out. I almost wish that they might not do so, for it is a painful discovery for any one to make; but it has the beneficial effect of making us cease from trusting in ourselves, and causing us to glory only in the Lord."

Other testimonies from the lips and pens of men equally pious and eminent might be given, but sufficient have been quoted to show what cause the saints of all ages have had for making their own these words, "O wretched man that I am." A few words now on the closing verse of Romans 7.

"Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" "Who shall deliver me?"; this is not the language of despair, but of earnest desire for help from without and above himself. That from which the apostle desired to be delivered is termed "the body of this death." This is a figurative expression for the carnal nature. Note how in Rom. 6:6 the carnal nature is termed "the body of sin," and as having "members" (Rom. 7:23). We therefore take the apostle's meaning to be, Who shall deliver me from this deadly and noxious burden—my sinful self!

In the next verse the apostle answers his question, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." It should be obvious to any impartial mind that this looks forward to the future. His question was, "Who shall deliver me?" His answer is, Jesus Christ *will*. How this exposes the error of those who teach a present "deliverance" from the carnal nature by the power of the Holy Spirit. In his answer, the apostle says nothing about the Holy Spirit; instead, he mentions only "Jesus Christ our Lord." It is not by the present work of the Spirit in us that Christians will be delivered "from this body of death," but by the yet future coming of the Lord Jesus Christ for us. It is *then* that this mortal shall put on immortality, and this corruptible shall put on incorruption.

But, as though to remove all doubt that this "deliver-

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ance" *is* future, the apostle concludes by saying, "So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin." Let every reader note carefully that this comes *after* he had thanked God that he would be "delivered." The last part of v. 25 sums up what he had said in this second part of Rom. 7. It describes the Christian's dual life. The new nature serves the law of God; the old nature, to the end of its history, will serve "the law of sin." That it was so with Paul himself is clear from what he wrote at the close of his life, when he termed himself, "the chief" of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). That was not the exaggeration of evangelical fervor, still less was it the mock modesty of hypocrisy. It was the assured conviction, the felt experience, the settled consciousness of one who saw deeply into the depths of corruption within himself, and who knew how far, far short he fell of attaining to the standard of holiness which God set before him. Such, too, will be the consciousness and confession of every other Christian who is not blinded by conceit. And the outcome of such a consciousness will be to make him long more ardently and thank God more fervently, for the promised deliverance at the return of our Lord and Saviour, when He shall "change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself" (Phil. 3:20); and having done so, He will "present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24). Hallelujah, what a Saviour!

It is remarkable that the only other time the word "wretched" (the only other time in the Greek too) is found in the New Testament occurs in Rev. 3:17, where to the Laodiceans Christ says, "and *knowest not* that thou ART WRETCHED!" Their boast was that they had "need of nothing." They were so puffed up with pride, so satisfied with their attainments, that they knew not their wretchedness. And is not this what we witness on every hand today? Is it not evident that we *are* now living in the Laodicean period of the history of Christendom? Many *were* conscious of a "need," but now they fancy they have received "the second blessing," or "the baptism of the Spirit," or that they have entered into "victory"; and, fancying this, they fondly imagine that *their* "need" has been *met*. And the proof of this is, *they* are the very ones who "*know not*" that "*they are wretched*." With an air of spiritual superiority they



will tell you that *they* have “got out of Rom. 7 into Rom. 8.” With pitiable complacency they will say that Rom. 7 no longer depicts *their* experience. With smug satisfaction they will look down in pity upon the Christian who cries, “O wretched man that I am,” and like the Pharisee in the temple, they will *thank God* that it is otherwise with them. Poor blinded souls. It is to just such that the Son of God here says, “And *knowest not* that *thou ART WRETCHED.*” We say “blinded” souls, for mark it is to these very Laodiceans that Christ says, “Anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that *thou mayest SEE*” (Rev. 3:18)!

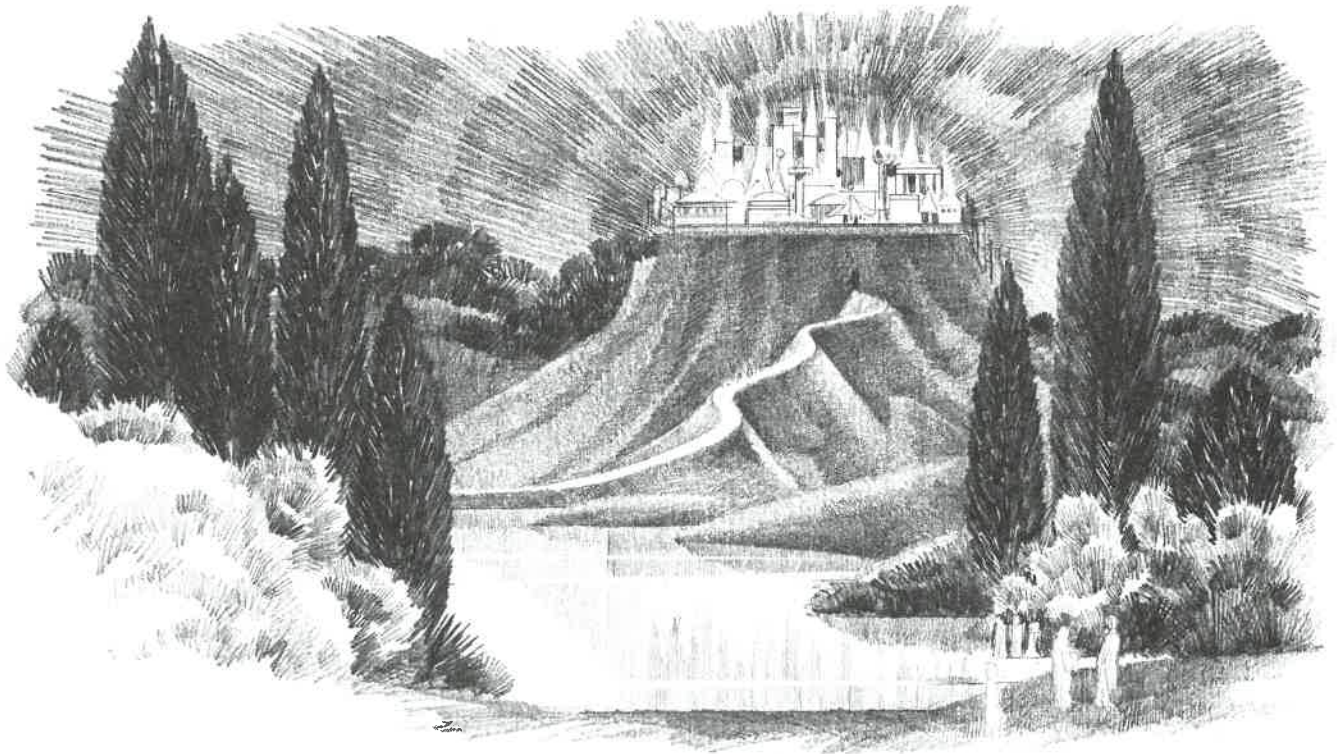
It is to be observed that in the second half of Rom. 7 the apostle speaks in the singular number. This is striking and most blessed. The Holy Spirit would intimate to us that the highest attainments in grace do not exempt the Christian from the painful experience there described. The apostle portrays with a master pen—himself sitting for the picture—the spiritual struggles of the child of God. He illustrates by a reference to his own personal experience the ceaseless conflict which is waged between the antagonistic natures in the one who has been born again.

May God in His mercy so deliver us from the spirit of pride which now defiles the air of modern Christendom, and grant us such a humbling view of our own uncleanness that we shall join the apostle in crying, with ever-deepening fervor, “O wretched man that I am.” Yea, may God vouchsafe to both writer and reader such a view of their own depravity and unworthiness that they may indeed grovel in the dust before Him, and there praise Him for His wondrous grace to such hell-deserving sinners.

## Προς Ρωμαίους

ζομένη θάνατον, ἵνα γένηται καθ' ὑπερβολὴν ἁμαρτωλὸς ἢ ἁμαρτία διὰ τῆς ἐντολῆς. Ὡίδαμεν γὰρ ὅτι ὁ νόμος πνευματικός ἐστιν· ἐγὼ δὲ ἴσῳ σὰρκινός εἰμι, πεπραμένος ὑπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτίαν. ὁ γὰρ κατεργάζομαι οὐ γινώσκω· οὐ γὰρ ὁ θέλω τοῦτο πράσσω, ἀλλ' ὁ μισῶ τοῦτο ποιῶ. εἰ δὲ ὁ οὐ θέλω τοῦτο ποιῶ, σύμφημι τῷ νόμῳ ὅτι ἰκαλός. νυνὶ δὲ οὐκέτι ἐγὼ κατεργάζομαι αὐτὸ ἀλλὰ ἡ ἐνοικοῦσα ἐν ἐμοὶ ἁμαρτία. οἶδα γὰρ ὅτι οὐκ οἰκεῖ ἐν ἐμοί, τοῦτ' ἐστὶν ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου, ἡ ἀγαθόν· τὸ γὰρ θέλειν παράκειται μοι, τὸ δὲ κατεργάζεσθαι τὸ καλὸν οὐ· οὐ γὰρ ὁ θέλω ποιῶ ἀγαθόν, ἀλλὰ ὁ οὐ θέλω ἃ κακὸν τοῦτο πράσσω. Ἐἰ δὲ ὁ οὐ θέλω ἐγὼ τοῦτο ποιῶ, οὐκέτι ἐγὼ κατεργάζομαι αὐτὸ ἀλλὰ ἡ οἰκοῦσα ἐν ἐμοὶ ἁμαρτία. Ἐυρίσκω ἄρα τὸν νόμον τῷ θέλοντι ἐμοὶ ποιεῖν τὸ καλόν, ὅτι ἐμοὶ τὸ κακὸν παράκειται· συνήδομαι γὰρ τῷ νόμῳ τοῦ θεοῦ κατὰ τὸν ἕσω ἄνθρωπον, ἃ βλέπω δὲ ἕτερον νόμον ἐν τοῖς μέλεσίν μου ἀντιστρατευόμενον τῷ νόμῳ τοῦ νοῦς μου καὶ αἰχμαλωτίζοντά με ἐν τῷ νόμῳ τῆς ἁμαρτίας τῷ ὄντι ἐν τοῖς μέλεσίν μου. Ἐταλαίπωρος ἐγὼ ἄνθρωπος· τίς με ῥύσεται ἐκ τοῦ σώματος τοῦ θανάτου τούτου; ἡ χάρις τῷ θεῷ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν. Ἐἄρα οὖν αὐτὸς ἐγὼ τῷ νόμῳ θεοῦ, τῇ δὲ σαρκὶ νόμῳ ἁμαρτίας· οὐδὲν ἄρα ἔσται κατάκριμα τοῖς ἐν Χρι-





# Putting Romans 7:14-25 into Perspective

Robert D. Brinsmead

## The Two Ages

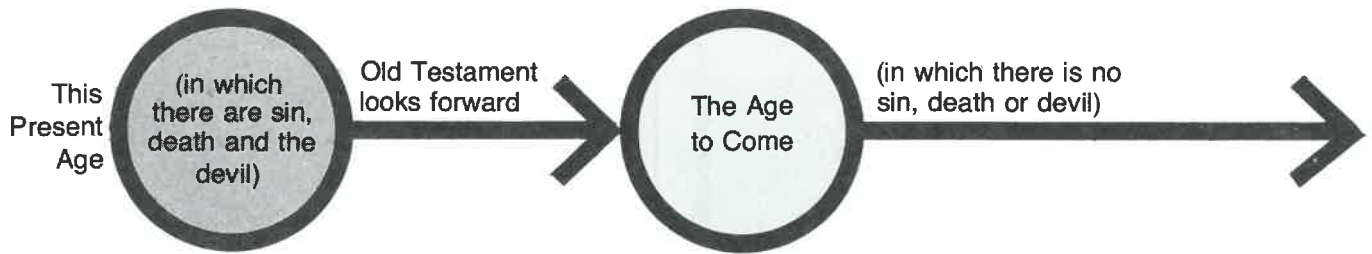
While the Greeks thought in terms of a dualism of matter and spirit, the Hebrews thought in terms of a dualism of time. Time was divided into two distinct ages: this present age and the age to come. (See Matt. 12:32; Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30; Gal. 1:4; Heb. 6:5; 1 Cor. 10:11. Where the Authorized Version uses the word *world*, the Greek literally reads *aeon* or *age*.)

The present age is evil, for in it there are sin, death and the activity of the devil. There is nothing wrong with the created order as such. God made it; and as it came from His hand, it was "very good" (Gen. 1:31). Sin has entered, however, and has disrupted the relationship between God, man and the created order. The concept of salvation which unfolds in the Old Testament is not after the Greek fashion of escape from the created order. Rather, it is the redemption and restoration of all that God has made.

In the Old Testament the result of man's sin is poignantly delineated. We see exile, captivity, disaster, sorrow, disappointment and death. Man's nature seems to

be incurably evil. The earth was destroyed by a flood because "the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and . . . every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). But God had to say the same thing about man after the flood, even though the world was as yet populated only by righteous Noah and his family (see Gen. 8:21). Israel, the chosen people, were exceedingly stiff-necked and perverse. The covenant between God and His people seemed to fail again and again. The present age was truly a night of weeping, a day when darkness covered the earth and dense darkness the people.

Yet the prophets dreamed of a new age. One day God would rise up and inaugurate it. The Judge of all the earth would arise and deal with sin. He would banish death, sorrow, crying and the enemy, and then would begin the age of light, everlasting joy, peace and security. The Old Testament looks beyond this present age to the glorious age to come.



For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in My people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed. And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of My people, and Mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them. And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, saith the Lord (Isa. 65:17-25).

And in this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. And He will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of His people shall He take away from off all the earth: for the Lord hath spoken it.

And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation (Isa. 25:6-9).

The Old Testament is forward looking. It declares: "Behold, the days come. . . ." "It shall come to pass that in the last days. . . ." "In that day. . . ." The saints of the

**The Old Testament looks beyond this present age to the glorious age to come.**

**It is essential to see that the believer is related to both ages at the same time.**

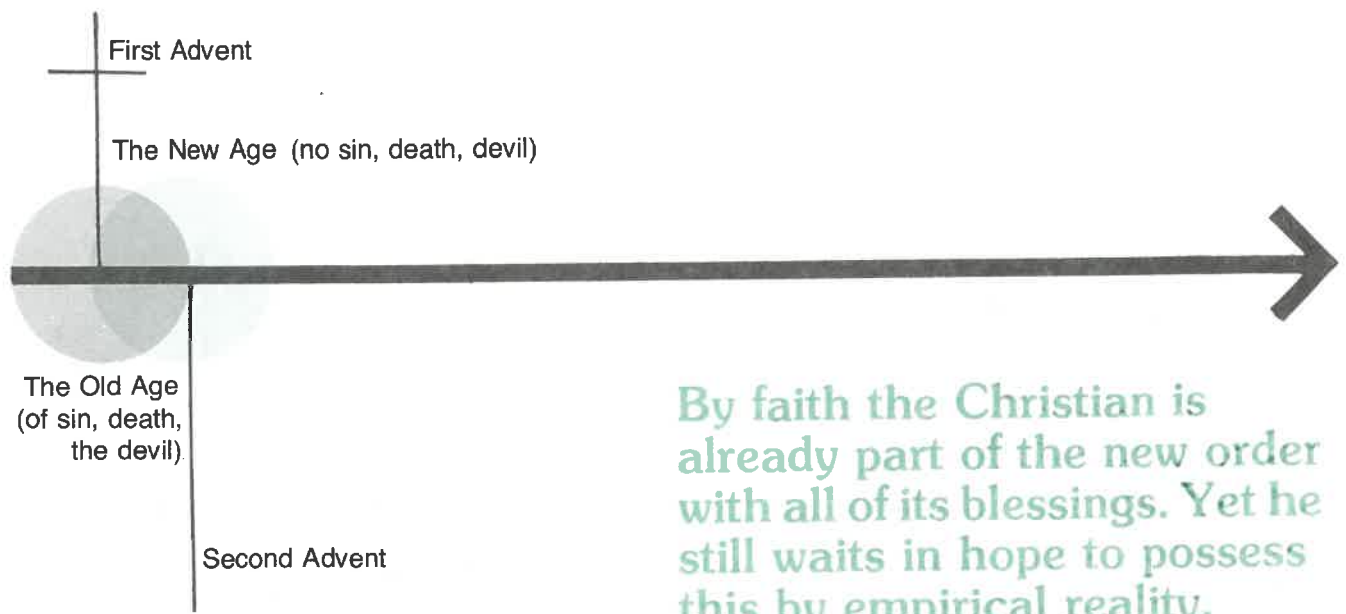
Old Testament stand on tiptoe, waiting for God's great act of salvation at the end of the age. The pious Jew came to view the present age as a preparation for the age to come.

The New Testament proclaims the astounding message that the long-looked-for "age to come" has already arrived in Jesus Christ. God's eschatological act of salvation has already taken place in the death and resurrection of Christ. Sin has been put away (Heb. 1:3; 9:26), death has been abolished (2 Tim. 1:10), and Satan has been defeated (Heb. 2:14; John 12:31). In the long-looked-for Messiah, the kingdom of God has arrived (Mark 1:15) and the new creation has already taken place (2 Cor. 5:17). The life of the age to come (*zoe aionios*—eternal life) has already broken in upon us.

No Jew, least of all Paul, could have written or read Romans 8 without being aware that what was being rehearsed and embraced in hope was the glory which God had promised would finally shine on his people Israel. The language in this chapter—of election, of calling, of justification, of glorification, of the saints, of God's foreknowledge, of his purpose, of redemption, of sonship, of inheritance—all belonged to the theology, and specifically to the eschatology of Israel. . . . Paul has just been exulting in the hope of glory which awaits those Jews whose patriarchal heritage has been confirmed to them (4:12), whose law has been therein established (3:31), and who lack nothing of all God promised them.—D. W. B. Robinson, Art. "The Priesthood of Paul in the Gospel of Hope," *Reconciliation and Hope*, ed. Robert Banks (Eerdmans, 1974).

The arrival of the eternal life of the new age—the new covenant, the new creation, the new Israel—is proclaimed in the gospel and seen only by faith. Its visible manifestation will not take place until the return of Jesus. Although the age to come has already broken into history in the Christ event, the old age will continue until His second coming. We may diagram the overlapping of the two ages as follows:





By faith the Christian is already part of the new order with all of its blessings. Yet he still waits in hope to possess this by empirical reality.

This means that the New Testament Christian, who lives between the two advents of Christ, also lives where the two ages have overlapped. On the one hand, eternal life, righteousness, salvation, the kingdom of God and the new creation have already come. And on the other hand, the believer waits for eternal life, righteousness, salvation, the kingdom of God and the new creation at the return of Christ at the end of the world (Titus 1:2; Gal. 5:5; 1 Thess. 5:8; Matt. 6:10; Rev. 21-22). By faith the Christian is already part of the new order with all of its blessings. Yet he still waits in hope to possess this by empirical reality.

This tension between having and not having may not be surrendered without surrendering the basic framework of the New Testament message and its entire perspective. It is essential to see that the believer is related to both ages at the same time. By faith (signified in baptism) he has been incorporated into Christ. All that humanity is in Christ, he is. He has been put to death, buried, resurrected and translated, and he now sits in heavenly places in Christ (Rom. 6:2-7; Col. 3:1-3; 1:13; Eph. 2:1-6). The old age has passed away. The new has arrived. And the Christian is already part of the new creation, which is yet to be visibly disclosed at the end of the world (2 Cor. 5:17). In Christ he is justified, translated, perfected forevermore and glorified at God's right hand (Gal. 3:24; Col. 1:13; Heb. 10:14; John 17:22). Because he lives and believes on Christ, he shall never die (John 11:26). He has passed from death unto life and has perfect righteousness and eternal life (John 5:24; Rom. 3:21-26).

But that is not all that needs to be said about the believer. He is not only related to the new age which we have described. He is also still related to this old, dying age. He must live here on this earth much the same as everyone else. He still has a sinful nature like everyone

else. He faces the prospect of death like everyone else. And he is dependent on earthly things and must eat, work and sleep like everyone else.

At this point we may see that there are two types of sinners, both of whom miss the way of truth. One type lives only for this age. The god of this world has blinded him to the glorious gospel. He does not see that this age has been judged and condemned. He fails to discern that the victorious new age has already arrived and that Christ is Lord. Therefore he lives wholly for this present evil world. He not only uses the things of this age, but he gives them ultimate significance. He is addicted to them, worships them and is enslaved by them. He lives only for this age because he is blind to the next.

But there is another type of sinner who is brought to view in the New Testament. He is not such an evident, open sinner as the one described above. Yet as far as Paul is concerned, he is far more troublesome in the church. He is the "pious" sinner, the super-saint. He claims to be so completely identified with the new age that he has no real relationship to the old one. He has blurred the distinction between the "now" and the "not yet," between faith and hope. His is an exaggerated spirituality which distorts reality. He has tried to prematurely seize the glory which shall be and, by so doing, has lost the real hope of the New Testament. This was the error of the first-century perfectionists, charismatics and ascetics.

True faith does not distort the reality of our situation. It does not mean living in a world of make-believe. By faith the Christian is righteous because he is related to Christ. By empirical reality he is yet sinful because he is still related to the old life of flesh and blood. He is, as Luther would say, *simul iustus et peccator*—at the same time righteous and a sinner. However, there





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is a difference between the way the believer relates to this age and the way an unbeliever relates to it. The believer cannot give ultimate significance to the things of this age. Therefore they do not rule and enslave him. He knows what Paul meant when he said:

But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away (1 Cor. 7:29-31).

Just as Christ's death and resurrection inaugurated the new age, so only the believer's death and his resurrection at the last day will end his relationship to the

old age. Until then he must live in the tension of "the times between." As depicted by Paul, this can be an agonizing situation. Faith and the gift of the Spirit do not put an end to tension. Rather, they inaugurate it. The fight of faith is not just a pretty-sounding cliché. It is a flesh-and-blood reality. There can be no release until faith is swallowed up in victory at the eschaton.

We believe that Romans 7:14-25 is a classical description of the believer who is justified and regenerated and who possesses the Spirit of "the age to come." Yet he is a man who must still live in the agonizing situation of being related to the old order with all that this means.

The conflict is due to the tension of the two ages and the believer's relation to both. It is not—as the older exegetes used to describe it—as if the good part of man were opposed to the bad part. No, the believer is wholly righteous by relation to Christ and the new age. And in himself he is wholly sinful by his relation to the old age.

### **The Law of God**

It would be a grave mistake and a serious distortion to read Romans 7:14-25 as if it were the total picture of the Christian life. We need to give full weight to what Paul says about the peace, joy and freedom of the Christian in Romans 5:1-11; 6:2-7, 14-19; 7:4-6; and 8:2-4.

## The believer is wholly righteous by relation to Christ and the new age. And in himself he is wholly sinful by his relation to the old age.

But neither should we read Romans 7:14-25 as if it were a description of a believer falling into acts of open transgression against the commandments of God. Unfortunately, the passage has often been read this way and has encouraged a pessimistic, defeatist view of the Christian life. Instead of serving God in the ardent and dedicated fervor of Paul, some have excused their lack of spirituality and devotion by saying: "Oh well, am I not just like Paul, who said, 'That which I do I allow not; and what I hate, that do I'? If that was true of Paul, you can't expect too much from me." A. J. Gordon once said, "It ill becomes Christian worldlings to throw stones at the Christian perfectionist."

Let us look at Romans 7:14-25, thinking of it as a description of one who is genuinely awakened to the glory, splendor and far-reaching claims of God's law. Indeed, this man is not one who can sin lightly. Much less is he one who rushes into sin. It is the greatest trouble and sorrow of his life. He loves and delights in the law of God. But he has such a keen sense and perception of its spirituality and the perfection of its divine standard that he always sees his best and holiest duties as falling far short of this law which is a beam of God's glory.

It is not an unconverted man who has such a marked sense of his shortcomings. Not even an awakened sinner has this keen appreciation of the glory, spirituality and far-reaching claims of God's law. Indeed, it is doubtful whether a newly converted Christian has the sharp insight of the man of Romans 7.

The law has the office of conducting the sinner to Christ so that he might be justified by faith (Gal. 3:24). This is how it is used by Paul in Romans 1 to 3. Yet we must not get the idea that justification is merely a one-time event. Paul does not just talk of it in the aorist tense. In Romans 3:23 he says, "For all have sinned [past], and come short [present continuous] of the glory of God." Justification is not merely a matter of provision for the "have sinned [past]" but for the "come short [present]."

" . . . by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh

**Faith and the gift of the Spirit do not put an end to tension. Rather, they inaugurate it.**

**At no time is there any point where a person can be righteous in God's sight if he is judged on the basis of how well he keeps the law.**

*be justified* in His sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20). It should be noticed that Paul does not say "become justified" but "be justified." If he had said "become justified," this would confine justification to a punctiliar event—i.e., Christian initiation. But the passage applies to a man who has been a saint for years as much as to a sinner who has never been converted. Paul means that at no time is there any point where a person can be righteous in God's sight if he is judged on the basis of how well he keeps the law. Many can be brought to see that the unregenerate sinner cannot become righteous before God by his life of obedience. But how about the man who is regenerate, who has the Holy Spirit and who walks in the way of new obedience? Paul teaches us that not even this man of God, with his many excellent virtues, can measure up to the undimmed splendor of God's law. This point becomes clear when we remember that in Romans 3:20 Paul is citing the words of David, "And enter not into judgment with Thy servant: for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified" (Ps. 143:2). When David said this, he was not an open, unconverted sinner. Rather, he was God's servant who could also say in another place, " . . . thy servant loveth it [the law]" (Ps. 119:140). He rejoiced in God's law and could weep to see others despise it (see Ps. 119). Yet, in view of all this,

Any believer who really has the Holy Spirit will know that even his new obedience cannot stand before the law of God and satisfy its divine standard.



he still confessed that he could not stand before God with an easy conscience on the basis of his piety.

When Paul cites Abraham's being counted righteous through faith (Rom. 4:3), Abraham had already been a believer and friend of God for many years and had exhibited many excellent virtues. Nevertheless, the law requires a better righteousness than David or Abraham could give, saints though they were. It is no accident that when Paul says "being justified freely by His grace" (Rom. 3:24), he uses the present continuous tense.

The implications of this present continuous nature of justification by grace are brought out in Romans 7:14-25. This passage holds an insight into Christian existence which is so necessary for a mature view of justification by faith. Here is portrayed a believer who has already been baptized into Christ.

Yet there are many who too quickly say, "I know that I can't keep the law to the satisfaction of divine justice in my own strength." They think that the whole point of the new covenant is to give them the Holy Spirit so that they can now carry out the terms of the covenant. But any believer who really has the Holy Spirit will know that even his new obedience cannot stand before the law of God and satisfy its divine standard. He may climb the alpine heights of holy living. Yet beyond and above him stands the law, demanding, "Holier yet!"

The law is not only necessary to lead a sinner to Christ in the first place. It is also necessary to keep the believer depending on the "alien righteousness" of Christ, which alone fulfills and satisfies the law. Without this continuing office of the law, the believer could easily settle down in a complacent, self-satisfied condition (like the blind Laodiceans), not knowing that in himself he is wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked.

This is why the doctrine of "the third use of the law" (the law as a rule of life) is so necessary for Christians. Unless they take God's law with radical seriousness, they will soon become "secure and lazy by the continual preaching of grace" (Luther). There is no time or point





in this life where we can do without this disciplinary function of the law.

We suggest, therefore, that Romans 7:14-25 is not describing a situation where a believer is committing overt acts of sin against his intentions. Rather, he is confessing that, judged by the law, when he wills to do good (not in the Greek sense of static and abstract intent but in the dynamic Hebrew sense of actively willing and doing) he has not done good. For the law can only acknowledge that good has been done if it has been done to the perfection of the divine standard. And when this man really hates evil, resists sin and refrains from wicked acts, he cannot on this account stand before the law with an easy conscience. For the law demands that sin not only be avoided but that it be hated with perfect and instant hatred. Where there is any secret inclination to evil, the law condemns a person as if the evil had been done. So this man of Romans 7 is confessing that, judged by the glory of the law, when he does good he has not done it at all, and when he hates evil he has not avoided it at all. Thus he is prevented from making a golden calf out of his sanctification.

Says Luther:

Paul, good man that he was, longed to be without sin, but to it he was chained. I too, in common with many others, long to stand outside it, but this cannot be. We belch forth the vapours of sin; we fall into it, rise up again, buffet and torment ourselves night and day; but, since we are confined in this flesh, since we have to bear about with us everywhere this stinking sack, we cannot rid ourselves completely of it, or even knock it senseless. We make vigorous attempts to do so, but the old Adam retains his power until he is deposited in the grave. The Kingdom of God is a foreign country, so foreign that even the saints must pray: "Almighty God, I acknowledge my sin unto thee. Reckon not unto me my guiltiness, O Lord." There is no sinless Christian. If thou chancest upon such a man, he is no Christian, but an anti-Christ.—Cited in Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 263.

Adds Barth:

How vast a gulf separates the nineteenth-century conquering-hero attitude to religion from that disgust of men at themselves, which is the characteristic mark of true religion!—*Ibid*, p. 269.

## Conclusion

Romans 7:14-25 was well understood by the Reformers. They used it effectively to establish the doctrine of indwelling sin in all believers, to shatter the perfectionism of their opponents and to raise up again the mighty Pauline doctrine of righteousness by faith alone.

**“How vast a gulf separates the nineteenth-century conquering-hero attitude to religion from that disgust of men at themselves, which is the characteristic mark of true religion!” —Karl Barth.**

# Romans 7:14-25 in the Theology of Paul

Tyndale Lecture delivered  
in Cambridge, 1974

James D. G. Dunn

Rom. 7 is one of those key passages in Paul's writings which offers us an insight into a whole dimension of Paul's thought and faith. Even more important, it is one of the few really pivotal passages in Paul's theology; by which I mean that *our* understanding of it will in large measure determine our understanding of Paul's theology as a whole, particularly his anthropology and soteriology. As interpretations of Rom. 7 differ, so interpretations of Paul's anthropology and soteriology markedly alter in content and emphasis. Dispute about a tense, a phrase, a half-verse in Rom. 7 means in fact dispute about the whole character of Paul's gospel.

As is well known, opinions regarding this passage have been divided *three ways*—a division which has persisted from the earliest centuries until today<sup>1</sup>. The different views can be summarized thus: (a) Rom. 7,14-25 is Paul's autobiographical account of his own pre-conversion experience; (b) Rom. 7,14-25 is *not* autobiographical, but depicts man in general, or the Jew in particular, apart from Christ, under the law; (c) Rom. 7,14-25 describes Paul's own experience even as a believer<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>See W. G. Kummel, *Romer 7 und die Bekehrung des Paulus* (1929), chap. 4; O. Kuss, *Zur Geschichte der Auslegung von Rom. 7, 7-25: Der Romerbrief* (1957), pp. 462-85.

<sup>2</sup>This paper is concerned primarily with 7,14-25 as such; but on 7,7-13 see below pp. 000.

a) The first of these owes its revival in modern theology to Pietism and was the dominant interpretation of Rom. 7 at the beginning of the present century: Rom. 7,14-25 describes *Paul's* pre-Christian experience, the torment of his vain attempt to gain righteousness by his own efforts. I quote from one study of Paul picked almost at random:

"In this conflict (7,15.21ff.) Saul lived, as Pharisee and persecutor. Heavier and heavier did the curse of the law become to him, the more he studied it and the more exactly he tried to keep the commandment. The 'principle of evil' of which he had heard, and which he had fancied was easy to overcome, became for him a visible personal reality; and it was just his vehement, proud and fiery temperament that longed after good so passionately, just this separated him farther and farther from God. What struggles must have raged through his conscience, until, conquered at last, he breaks out in the despairing cry: 'I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing. For to will is present with me, but to do that which is good is not. So now it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwelleth in me!' . . ."<sup>3</sup>

On this interpretation Rom. 8 describes the transition for Paul from experience under the law to experience under grace; and at once we have a clear psychological insight into Paul's conversion and into its

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<sup>3</sup>H. Weinel, *St. Paul, the Man and His Work* (1906), pp. 74f. Kummel (n. 1) cites more than 50 proponents of this interpretation, p. 141, n. 2.

importance in his theology. In particular, we gain a better understanding of Paul's attitude to the law and a better understanding of what his gospel of liberation meant for him in the reality of his own experience.

b) The important monograph by W. G. Kummel in 1929 signalled the end of this autobiographical interpretation for most continental scholars. For Kummel Rom. 7 was not so much Paul's experience under the law as Paul's Christian portrayal of *man* under the law. The frequently used "I" of Rom. 7 was not Paul himself but rather a stylistic form making for a more vivid style than our colourless "one"<sup>4</sup>. It is this interpretation of Rom. 7 which lies at the heart of Bultmann's influential existentialist analysis of Paul's theology. Here is the fullest expression of Paul's understanding of human existence apart from faith<sup>5</sup>. Here, if I am not mistaken, is one of the central supports, perhaps the central support, for two of Bultmann's most famous assertions: that "Paul's theology is, at the same time, anthropology"<sup>6</sup>; and that the existentialist demythologizing of the N.T. is validated by the understanding of human existence which the N.T. itself enshrines<sup>7</sup>.

c) Continuing to commend some support, but very definitely a minority view in modern exegesis, is the classic interpretation of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, of Luther and Calvin, that in Rom. 7 Paul describes his continuing experience as a believer. Where the majority interpretations read Rom. 7 as a transcript of an experience which belongs to the past, an experience which Paul the Christian no longer knows, if he ever knew it, this minority interpretation reads Rom. 7 as Paul's expression of his own experience *now*, even as a Christian<sup>8</sup>. Here quite clearly is involved not merely a different interpretation of Rom. 7, but a quite different understanding of what the gospel meant in existential reality for the Pauline believer.

This third, the minority interpretation, commends itself most strongly to me. It does so for two main reasons. First, it is the most natural interpretation of Rom. 7 itself and of Rom. 7 in its immediate context. Second, it is wholly of a piece with Paul's larger understanding of what the experience of grace means for the believer in the here and now. The rest of this paper will be de-

voted to an elaboration of these two claims. Its main contribution to the debate will, I hope, come in the exposition of the continuing two-sided nature of Christian experience, as an experience of flesh as well as of Spirit, of death as well as of life.

## 1.

The autobiographical interpretation of Rom. 7,14-25 has an immediate appeal—Paul speaks in the first person because he speaks of his own experience. But *no one*, especially those more familiar with one of the two *autobiographical* interpretations of Rom. 7, should underestimate the strength of the case argued by Kummel. It gains its greatest strength from two observations.

First, the contrast between the condition so graphically portrayed in Rom. 7,14-25 and that described by Paul in Rom. 6,1-7,6 and Rom. 8. The "wretched man" of 7,23 laments, "I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members". But Paul the Christian exults in 7,6, "Now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive . . ." How can this be the same person, the same condition? The "wretched man" of 7,14 confesses sorrowfully, "I am carnal (sarkinos), the purchased slave of sin". But Paul the Christian cries joyfully, "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death" (8,2). How can this be the same person, the same condition<sup>9</sup>? If appeal be made to Gal. 5,17—"The desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for they are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would" (RSV)—Kummel replies that the cases are different. A choice lies before the man of Gal. 5,17—he may walk according to the Spirit or he may gratify the desires of the flesh. The man of Rom. 7 has no choice—he is the slave of sin and knows no liberator, he cannot do what he would, the possibility of walking according to the Spirit has not yet been given him. To be sure the Christian always is in danger of serving the flesh, but the continued and uninterrupted failure and despondency of Rom. 7 is something different<sup>10</sup>.

The second critical observation of Kummel is that the "I" of 7,7-13 can hardly be autobiographical. For one thing Paul says in 7,9, "I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died". If one wanted to describe the dawning con-

<sup>4</sup>Kummel (n. 1), pp. 117-32.

<sup>5</sup>R. Bultmann, *Romans 7 and the Anthropology of Paul: Existence and Faith* (1960, repr. 1964), pp. 173-85; *Theology of the New Testament* (1952), pp. 245-48.

<sup>6</sup>Bultmann (n. 5), *Theology*, p. 191.

<sup>7</sup>R. Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology: H. W. Bartsch* (ed.), *Kerygma and Myth* (1953), p. 12; note the reference to H. Jonas, *Augustin und das paulinische Freiheitsproblem* (1930).

<sup>8</sup>Maintained most forcefully in recent years by A. Nygren, *Commentary on Romans* (1952), pp. 284-303. See also J. Knox, *Romans: Interpreter's Bible*, 9 (1954); J. Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (1960), pp. 257ff.; K. Stalder, *Das Werk des Geistes in der Heiligung bei Paulus* (1962), pp. 291-307; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Romans* (1963); J. I. Packer, "The 'Wretched Man' of Romans 7: *Studia Evang.* 2 (1964), pp. 621-7; J. A. Ziesler, *The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul* (1965), pp. 2-37; L. Cerfaux, *The Christian in the Theology of St Paul* (1967), p. 442; C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 1 (1975), pp. 341-7, 356-70.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. Kummel (n. 1), pp. 10ff.; P. Althaus, *Zur Auslegung von Rom. 7,14ff.*: *Theol. Lit.zeit.* 77 (1952), col. 479; F. J. Leenhardt, *The Epistle to the Romans* (1961), pp. 182f.; H. W. Schmidt, *Der Brief an die Römer* (1963), pp. 128f.; P. von der Osten-Sacken, *Römer 8 als Beispiel paulinischer Soteriologie* (1975), pp. 215-8.

<sup>10</sup>Kummel (n. 1), pp. 104ff.; Althaus (n. 9), pp. 478f.; C. L. Mitton, *Romans 7 Reconsidered: Exp. Times* 65 (1953-54), p. 102; E. Gaugler, *Der Brief an die Römer* (1958), pp. 236f.; O. Michel, *Der Brief an die Römer* (1963), p. 171.



sciousness of sin in oneself, this is hardly the most natural language to choose; in particular, a Jew would hardly describe his childhood as a time "without the law"<sup>11</sup>. For another, 7,7ff. is intended primarily as an apology for the law, not as an autobiographical report; it can only serve as such if it describes a more than merely personal experience of the law<sup>12</sup>. And for another, we may add, the autobiographical interpretation of 7,7-13 implies a pre-Christian religious experience of Paul which runs directly counter to Paul's own description of his pre-Christian attitude of mind in Gal. 1,13f. and Phil. 3,6—"as to righteousness under the law, blameless"<sup>13</sup>. Such considerations have led some to the conclusion that the "I" means Adam, or the Jewish race (cf. 7,9f. with 5,13), but Kummel comes to the conclusion that the "I" is a rhetorical form. And if the "I" of 7,7-13 is a figure of style, so is the "I" of 7,14-25<sup>14</sup>—a conclusion which Kummel backs up by suggesting parallels both within Paul and contemporary literature where the first person singular is not intended to be taken autobiographically<sup>15</sup>.

These two points give us the heart of the case against the minority interpretation of Rom. 7,14-25. In fact however the case so far presented does *not* have as much cogency as its proponents claim. This I hope will become evident from the following considerations, the first two of which respond to the points argued by Kummel in more general terms, the rest being concerned with more detailed points of exegesis.

1) Kummel repeatedly insists that the condition depicted in Rom. 7 is different from that presupposed in Rom. 6 and 8. But in that case Rom. 7,7-25 becomes an unnecessary interruption and digression in Paul's train of thought, much more suited to the context of Rom. 2-3 than that of 6-8. Yet Romans is a much more carefully planned work than any of his other letters, so that it is more likely that 7,7-25 belongs where it does by deliberate choice. In which case it is probable that Paul's thought flows consistently from Rom. 6 through 7 to 8<sup>16</sup>—in the course of which he looks in turn at the Christian in relation to three key realities of his experience: to sin (6), to sin and the law (7), to the law and the Spirit (8, 1-8) and to the Spirit (8,9-30). The difference between 7,7-25 and the rest of these chapters may therefore denote not different conditions but the same condi-

## There is nothing in Rom. 7 which demands that the frequently repeated "I"/"me" be understood in a way which distances Paul from the experience he is describing.

tion viewed from different aspects. The "wretched man" of Rom. 7 may be the believer seen only in terms of the flesh, law and sin. That is to say, Rom. 7,7-25 may describe a continuing dimension of the believer's *experience, even as a believer*. Certainly the language of 7,14,23 is strong. But is it no more possible for the Pauline believer to say, "I am fleshly, and as such the slave of sin", and, "Even as a Christian I am captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members"? I believe that Paul's answer is Yes, and will hope to demonstrate it in the next section.

2) There is nothing in Rom. 7 which demands that the frequently repeated "I"/"me" (about 20 times) be understood in a way which distances Paul from the experience he is describing. It is certainly quite probable that in 7,7-13 at least he is describing *typical experience* of an "I"<sup>17</sup>, but the existential anguish and frustration of vv. 15ff. and 24 is too real, too sharply poignant to permit any reduction of the "I" to a mere figure of style. Whatever else this is, it is surely Paul speaking from the heart of *his own experience*<sup>18</sup>. I must confess that it seems to me a rather convoluted process of reasoning which argues both that the "I" does not denote Paul's personal experience but that it does denote the experience of everyman—everyman, except Paul!<sup>19</sup> Surely the "I"-style is chosen to denote typical experience, precisely because it is so typical that it includes my experience. This is true of most of the "I"-passages Kummel quotes from Paul to support his view that "I" is merely rhetorical: apart from the one or two which quote the objections of (real or imaginary) objectors, in the rest Paul uses "I" as including me, not "I" meaning

<sup>11</sup>See also G. Bornkamm, *Sin, Law and Death: Early Christian Experience* (1969), p. 93; H. Conzelmann, *An Outline of the Theology of the New Testament* (1969), p. 233.

<sup>12</sup>Kummel (n. 1), pp. 76-84.

<sup>13</sup>See e.g. Gaugler (n. 10), pp. 238f.; Schmidt (n. 9), p. 127; E. Kasemann, *An die Römer* (1974), p. 183.

<sup>14</sup>Kummel (n. 1), pp. 85-97. See also Bornkamm (n. 11), pp. 92ff.; P. Althaus, *Der Brief an die Römer* (1966), pp. 74, 79ff. For the interpretation of "I" in terms of salvation-history see particularly E. Stauffer, *Theol. Wort.* 2 (1936), pp. 358-62; S. Lyonnet, *L'histoire du salut selon la chapître VII de l'Épître aux Romains: Rev. bibl.* 43 (1962), pp. 117-51.

<sup>15</sup>Kummel (n. 1), pp. 121-32. The Pauline passages cited are, Rom. 3,5, 7,1, Cor. 6,12, 15, 10,29f., 11,31f., 13,1-3, 11f., 14,11, 14, 15, Gal. 2,18.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. particularly Nygren (n. 8), pp. 287f.

<sup>17</sup>II Baruch 54,19:

Adam is therefore not the cause, save only of his own soul,  
But each of us has been the Adam of his own soul.

That Paul here uses Adam typology is widely recognized. See e.g. C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans* (1957), pp. 143f.; Leenhardt (n. 9), pp. 186ff.; E. Brandenburger, *Adam and Christus* (1962), pp. 215f.

<sup>18</sup>C. H. Dodd, *The Epistle to the Romans* (1932), pp. 106f.; cf. M. Goguel, *The Birth of Christianity* (1953), pp. 213f.; Cranfield (n. 8), p. 344. E. Stauffer, *New Testament Theology* (1955), p. 275, n. 239, thinks that Kummel's "rhetorical-universal interpretation founders on Gal. 2,15".

<sup>19</sup>Cf. e.g. Bultmann (n. 5), p. 177: "this 'willing' is the trans-subjective propensity of human existence as such"; Leenhardt (n. 9), pp. 183ff.; G. Bornkamm, *Paul* (1971), pp. 125f.

anyone but me<sup>20</sup>. And it is true also of Rom. 7,7-13. To be sure, the contrast particularly with Phil. 3,6 is very marked. But then we must not make the mistake of taking Phil. 3,6 out of its polemical context and erecting it into a dogmatic statement about Paul's pre-Christian past. In Phil. 3,6 Paul describes his pre-Christian experience from his *then Jewish* standpoint in language that would most impress the Jewish mind. But in Rom. 7,7-13 he describes his pre-Christian experience from his *now Christian* standpoint. Elsewhere he thinks of the pre-Christian condition in terms of death, and of conversion as a being made alive (Rom. 4,17, 6,13, 11,15, 2. Cor. 3,6f., Col. 2,13, Eph. 2,15, 5,14). So there is no real difficulty in concluding that the "I died" of Rom. 7,9 is Paul's *Christian* recognition of the real relation he had to the law before "the revelation of Jesus Christ" came to him on the Damascus road<sup>21</sup>. If the autobiographical interpretation of "I" is defensible for 7,7-13, it is all the more plausible for the rest of 7.

These first two more general points have not answered all of Kummel's case, but they do put several large question marks against it. The following points of exegesis do not constitute an exhaustive exegesis by any means, but they are the points most relevant to the debate since Kummel, and they do I think begin to tip the scale in favour of the view that Rom. 7,14-25 describes Paul's own experience as a believer.

3) The tense of *edein* in v. 7: "I would not have known (*edein*) what it was to covet had the law not said, 'You shall not covet'." *Edein* is a pluperfect with imperfect sense<sup>22</sup>—that is, Paul probably intends it to describe the beginning of a *continuing experience*: he still experiences lust. The covetousness which, as he now recognizes, characterized his pre-Christian past (n. 21), is still a feature of his Christian present. Consequently 7,7-13 is not an interruption to the flow of thought through 6 to 8 (point 1. above)<sup>23</sup>, since it in fact describes the beginning of an experience which continues for the believer—one aspect of Paul's experience even as a Christian. Even as a Christian there is still a sense in which he can and must say, "I died and am dead because of sin" (cf. 8,10 below).

4) The change of tense between vv. 7-13 and 14ff.

<sup>20</sup>Cf. K. Kertelge, *Exegetische Überlegungen zum Verständnis der paulinischen Anthropologie nach Römer 7*: Zs. ntl. Wiss. 62 (1971), pp. 107f. To Gal. 2,18, Kummel, "Individualgeschichte" und "Weltgeschichte" in Gal. 2,15-21: Christ and Spirit in the New Testament, Stud. in Honour of C. F. D. Moule (1973), pp. 157-72, would now add Gal. 2,19-21. But however typical the "I" in these verses it must surely include Paul himself and arise in large part at least out of his own experience; cf. E. D. Burton, *Galatians* (1921), p. 132; A. Oepke, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Galater* (1964), p. 62.

<sup>21</sup>It is unnecessary to fix on a specific event or date, as when he was made a bar-mitzvah, son of commandment, at the age of 13 (?)—see W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (1948), pp. 24ff. Paul is here rather describing his recognition now, in the light of his faith in Christ, that his earlier coveting of righteousness by means of the law was in fact an abuse and a breach of the law—so that his very longing and striving for the life that the law promised only enmeshed him ever more firmly in the power of death.

<sup>22</sup>Barrett (n. 17), p. 142; Cranfield (n. 8), p. 348.

<sup>23</sup>Against Althaus (n. 9), col. 477; Mitton (n. 10), p. 101.

## Rom. 7,22 refers to Paul the Christian, the man who is both in Christ and in Adam at one and the same time and whose experience is characterized precisely by the tension and frustration of divided loyalties.

In 7,7-13 Paul speaks in the past tense—of a stage of experience which was behind him. In vv. 14ff. he speaks in the present tense, that is, of his present experience as a Christian.<sup>24</sup> The fact that Paul does not make much of the transition, that his thought moves from past to present almost unconsciously, underlines the degree of continuity which Paul recognizes between his pre-Christian experience and his experience as a Christian. But there is a difference. In vv. 7-13 there was no resistance: sin launched its attack<sup>25</sup>, struck him down, and left him for dead with no fight in him. But in vv. 14ff. we see battle joined—we see Paul with a resistance and firmness of purpose which was lacking in vv. 7-13. He is still defeated, but he is now fighting. Where the strength of the counter attack comes from we will not learn till chapter 8, but the suggestion is already implicit that it is the Spirit joining battle in Paul with the flesh (Rom. 8,2ff.).

5) "The inner man" (*ho eso anthropos*) of v. 22—"I delight in the law of God in my inmost self". This phrase most probably refers to the believer as part of the new age, renewed by the Spirit, belonging to Christ the last Adam<sup>26</sup>. This is certainly the sense Paul intends in 2. Cor. 4,16, the closest parallel to the usage in Rom. 7,22<sup>27</sup>. There it stands in contrast to "the outward man", that is man as part of the old age, man in solidarity with the first Adam. And the parallel is clear with Paul's later contrast between "the new man" and "the old man" (Col. 3,9f., Eph. 4,22ff.; cf. Gal. 3,27 with Rom. 13,14), as also with his contrast between Spirit and flesh (see below). The implication is therefore that Rom. 7,22 refers to Paul the Christian, the man who is both in Christ *and* in Adam at one and the same

<sup>24</sup>Nygren (n. 8), pp. 285, 288f.: Rom. 7,7ff. can indeed be described as an "apology for the law" (Kummel), but the apology is complete with v. 13. Vv. 14ff. deal primarily with the relation between the "I" and sin rather than between the law and sin (vv. 7-13). Cf. U. Luz, *Das Geschichtsverständnis des Paulus* (1968), p. 159, n. 86; Cranfield (n. 8), pp. 344f.

<sup>25</sup>For *aforme* as evoking military imagery cf. Arndt & Gingrich, s.v.; Barrett (n. 17), p. 142.

<sup>26</sup>Barrett (n. 17), p. 150; Cranfield (n. 8), pp. 346, 363. Kummel (n. 1), pp. 59ff., attempts to restrict the meaning of *ho eso anthropos* in v. 22 in an artificial way. Kasemann (n. 13), pp. 196f., recognizes the sharpness of the problem posed by this phrase without resolving it satisfactorily.

<sup>27</sup>Cf. Eph. 3,16, the only other occurrence of the phrase in the Pauline corpus.

time and whose experience is characterized precisely by the tension and frustration of divided loyalties.

6) A particularly crucial verse is 7,25b—"I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin." This is the central pivot on which our whole understanding of Paul's gospel turns. It is the stone on which the majority interpretations of Rom. 7,14-25 break and fall—hence the rather feverish attempts to omit the verse as a later gloss<sup>28</sup> or to rewrite the last section of 7 with v. 25b interposed between v. 23 and v. 24<sup>29</sup>. There is no textual support for either hypothesis. In such cases the soundest judgment is almost always that the hypothesis defended is more suspect than the text emended. The significance of 7,25b is that it comes after 7,25a and that it is the conclusion to chapter 7 as a whole<sup>30</sup>. Even after the shout of thanksgiving Paul still says, "So then, I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin." The "mind" here must be the mind renewed by the Spirit (cf. Rom. 12,2), since Paul nowhere else speaks so positively of the "natural" mind<sup>31</sup>. "Mind" is then more or less synonymous with "the inner man" of v. 22. Hence, both before and after v. 25a Paul expresses his experience as a *believer*. It is as one who knows Christ as Lord that Paul confesses, "I with my flesh, as flesh, go on serving the law of sin." Here then is Paul's conclusion to his discussion of the Christian's relation to sin and law—it is not a relation which has been left behind<sup>32</sup>, rather it is a relation which continues even for the man who also experiences the Spirit. The antithesis between the inward man and the flesh is not overcome and left behind, it continues through and

<sup>28</sup>R. Bultmann, *Glossen im Römerbrief*: Theol. Lit.zeit. 72 (1947), 198f.; G. Zuntz, *The Text of the Epistles*: Schweich Lectures 1946 (1953), p. 16; Kuss (n. 1), p. 461; Luz (n. 24), p. 160; H. Paulsen, *Überlieferung und Auslegung in Rom. 8* (Diss. Mainz 1972), pp. 44-50; cf. Bornkamm (n. 11), p. 99; Leenhardt (n. 9), p. 195; E. Schweizer, *Theol. Wort.* 7 (1964), p. 133, n. 276; Kasemann (n. 13), pp. 201f.

<sup>29</sup>Moffatt's translation; Dodd (n. 18), pp. 114f.; F. Müller, *Zwei Marginalien im Brief des Paulus an die Römer*: Zs. ntl. Wiss. 40 (1941), pp. 249-54; Michel (n. 10), pp. 179f.; G. Eichholz, *Die Theologie des Paulus im Umriss* (1972), p. 257.

<sup>30</sup>Rom. 8,1 does not provide a conclusion to Rom. 7, but gathers up the whole of the preceding section 5-7, as Kummel (n. 1), p. 69, recognizes.

<sup>31</sup>A difficulty also recognized by Kummel, pp. 27ff.; see further above n. 26.

<sup>32</sup>To read Rom. 7,25b as a summary of the pre-Christian experience of 7,7-25: A. Sanday and A. C. Headlam, *Romans* (51902), p. 184; Kummel (n. 1), pp. 65f.; Gaugler (n. 10), p. 282, makes too light of v. 25a and leaves 7,25b as a pathetic anti-climax. Nor does it really solve the problem to take 7,25b with 8,1ff. rather than with 7; J. Kurzinger, *Der Schlüssel zum Verständnis von Rom. 7*: Bibl. Zs. 7 (1963), pp. 270-4. The case is not strengthened by forcing the *autos ego* into the unparalleled sense, "I left to myself", as by J. B. Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St Paul* (1895), p. 305; Sanday and Headlam, p. 178; Mitton (n. 10), pp. 133f.; Schmidt (n. 9), p. 133; R. N. Longenecker, *Paul, Apostle of Liberty* (1964), pp. 111f. But see also Packer (n. 8), p. 625; Luz (n. 24), p. 160, n. 89.



## The struggle so vividly depicted in Rom. 7,14-25 does not end when the Spirit comes; on the contrary, that is when it really begins.

beyond the shout of thanksgiving—as a continuing antithesis between mind and flesh. The “I” is still divided. In other words, the struggle so vividly depicted in 7,14-25 does not end when the Spirit comes; on the contrary, that is when it really begins<sup>33</sup>. Service of the law of God means victory for the Spirit; service of the law of sin means victory for the flesh; and there is no battle in which the flesh is wholly the loser till the last battle. This is the paradox and tension of the believer’s experience so long as this age lasts—*simul iustus et peccator*<sup>34</sup>.

7) Rom. 8,1ff. At first sight 8,1ff. seem to speak of a wholly different experience. In fact however these verses only elaborate the other side of the paradox. Rom. 8,2 cannot denote complete liberation from the power of the flesh and of death—even men of the Spirit die (1. Thess. 4,13, 1. Cor. 15,26). Rather v. 2 speaks of an experience where with the coming of the Spirit the law of sin is no longer the sole determiner of present conduct or the final determiner of ultimate destiny<sup>35</sup>. And in 8,4ff. Paul does not contrast believer with unbeliever<sup>36</sup>; rather he confronts the believer with both sides of the paradox, both sides of his nature as believer. If he lives solely on the level of the flesh, solely as flesh, then his ultimate destiny is death (vv. 6ff., Gal. 6,8a). But if he allows his walk to be determined by the Spirit, then his ultimate destiny is life—life in death, life through death, life beyond death (vv. 6,10f., Gal. 6,8b). In v. 10 the continuity of thought between 7,14-25 and 8 is perhaps most clearly evident and the continuing paradox of flesh and Spirit, death and life, comes to striking expression: “If Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness<sup>37</sup>.” The body is dead because the Christian is still as flesh a member of the first Adam—dead towards God, dead in sin, heading for death; the “body” of which Paul

<sup>33</sup>Cf. Calvin on 7,15: “It has been well said that the carnal man plunges into sin with the consent and concurrence of his soul, but that a division at once begins as soon as he is called by the Lord and renewed by the Spirit.”

<sup>34</sup>Luther, Commentary on Rom. 7,25: “This is the most telling passage of all. Notice that one and the same man serves both the law of God and the law of sin, that he is righteous and at the same time he sins.”

<sup>35</sup>If the law of v. 2b is the Mosaic law, then the liberty of which Paul speaks is freedom from the law as a means to righteousness. In neither case does he imply that the believer is free from temptation or from sinning.

<sup>36</sup>Against H. Lietzmann, *An die Römer* (1971), pp. 79f. In 8,9 note the error; see J. D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (1970), p. 148.

<sup>37</sup>RSV is wrong in translating *soma* and *pneuma* as the plurals “bodies” and “spirits”. Most modern commentators recognize that in the context *pneuma* almost certainly means (Holy) Spirit.

speaks in 8,10 is the same “body of death” for deliverance from which he longs in 7,24. But the Christian *also*, at the same time, has the Spirit, also shares the life of the last Adam, the life-giving Spirit; as such he is alive towards God, dead to sin. In short, the Christian lives on two levels at once—he knows both life and death at the same time<sup>38</sup>. Finally 8,12f.—“So then, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live.” Notice that it is to Christians that Paul utters this word—both of warning and of encouragement. The seriousness of the warning underlines the fact that the Christian even as Christian still lives in the realm of flesh, may still allow his whole life to be dominated by the appetites and weaknesses of the sin-dominated dimension of his present life. In which case he will die as flesh and be destroyed with the destruction of the flesh. Only if he allows the Spirit also to determine his relationships with the world and its values, to contest his worldly appetites and weaknesses, only then will life have the last say through death and beyond death. But in the meantime the believer is both flesh and has the Spirit, knows both death and life and he must constantly choose whose prompting he will follow.

In the last two paragraphs in particular two themes began to emerge which have obvious repercussions for our understanding of Paul at this point, as indeed for our understanding of Paul’s soteriology as a whole—the relation between the Christian and *flesh* and the relation between the Christian and *death*. These themes must now be taken up and elaborated if we are to demonstrate that the interpretation of Rom. 7,14-25 here proposed is wholly of a piece with the rest of Paul’s theology.

## 2.

Since the rediscovery of the eschatological dimension of N.T. faith and experience it has become widely accepted that Paul’s soteriology is characterized by an Already/Not yet tension, the tension between the Already of Jesus’ resurrection and the Not yet of his parou-

## The Christian lives on two levels at once—he knows both life and death at the same time.

<sup>38</sup>Cf. W. Crundmann, *Theol. Wort.* 1 (1933), p. 313; M. Dibelius, *Paulus und die Mystik: Botschaft und Geschichte* 2 (1956), p. 150; W. Pfister, *Das Leben im Geist nach Paulus* (1963), p. 46.

## For Paul the believer is caught between fulfillment and consummation; he lives in the overlap of the ages.

sia. For Paul the believer is caught between fulfillment and consummation; he lives in the overlap of the ages, where the new age of resurrection life has already begun, but the old age of existence in the flesh has not yet ended, where the final work of God has *begun* in him but is not yet completed (Phil. 1,6). No one has elaborated this aspect of Pauline thought and of N.T. thought in general more helpfully than O. Cullmann:

"It is characteristic of all N.T. salvation history that between Christ's resurrection and his return there is an interval, the essence of which is determined by this tension<sup>39</sup>."

As I have pointed out elsewhere<sup>40</sup>, this tension underlies the whole of Paul's soteriology. We see this perhaps most clearly in the *metaphors* he uses to describe the Christian's experience of the new age, and in his understanding of the *Spirit*. Thus he uses key metaphors like "justification", "redemption" and "salvation" both of that which is already realized or being realized in the believer's experience and of that which is yet outstanding<sup>41</sup>. Again, believers have already received the Spirit of adoption and are God's sons, but they still await adoption as sons (Rom. 8,14f., 23). In 1. Cor. 6,17 Paul describes the believer's relation with Christ in terms of a marriage already consummated; but in 2. Cor. 11,2 he thinks of conversion as a betrothal and of life in the present as preparation for the not yet consummation of marriage itself (cf. Eph. 5,25ff.). In all these cases the two-sided nature of Paul's experience as a believer is clearly evident; the joy of already liberation is balanced by the sigh of frustrated longing for the complete liberty of the sons of God (Rom. 8,19-25, 2. Cor. 5,1-5).

So too the Spirit of God is essentially the eschatological Spirit—that power of the not yet which is already at work in the believer<sup>42</sup>. Hence as the risen Jesus is the *aparche*, the first fruits, the beginning of the eschatological harvest of resurrection (1. Cor. 15,20,23), so

<sup>39</sup>O. Cullmann, *Salvation in History* (1967), p. 202; see also pp. 248-68 and *Christ and Time* (1962).

<sup>40</sup>J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* (1975), 53; cf. *idem*, *Spirit and Kingdom: Exp. Times* 82 (1970-71), pp. 36-40.

<sup>41</sup>E.g. justification—Rom. 5,1, but cf. Gal. 5,5; redemption—Rom. 3,24, Col. 1,14, but cf. Rom. 8,23, Eph. 1,14; salvation—cf. Rom. 5,9f., 13,11, 1. Thess. 5,8f. with tenses used in 1 Cor. 1,18, 15,2, 2. Cor. 2,15 and Eph. 2,5, 8.

<sup>42</sup>See particularly G. Vos, *The Eschatological Aspect of the Pauline Concept of the Spirit: Biblical and Theological Stud.* (1912), pp. 211-59; H. D. Wendland, *Das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes in den Glaubigen nach Paulus: Theol. Lit.zeit.* 77 (1952), col. 457-70; N. Q. Hamilton, *The Holy Spirit and Eschatology in Paul* (1957).

the Spirit is the *aparche*, the first fruits, the beginning of the eschatological harvest of resurrection power (Rom. 8,23). The Spirit is the *arrabon*, the first installment of resurrection life which guarantees the full bestowal of resurrection life in the future (2. Cor. 1,22, 5,5, Eph. 1,14). The gift of the Spirit is the first part of the eschatological inheritance of sonship and kingdom into which the believer will enter at the final consummation (Rom. 8,15-17, 1. Cor. 6,9 11, Gal. 4,1-7, Eph. 1,14)<sup>43</sup>. In short, the gift of the Spirit is the beginning of that process of salvation and redemption which will not be completed until the Spirit has extended his sway over the whole man, that is, until the believer has become a spiritual body, that is, until the resurrection of the body (1. Cor. 15,44-50).

All this is fairly common ground. Often less fully appreciated is what all this means for the believer in relation to the *flesh* and to death. Only when we have begun to appreciate how the Christian stands in relation to the flesh and to death in Paul's thought, only then will we begin to appreciate how deeply Rom. 7,14-25 is embedded in Paul's soteriology and how clearly it reflects his understanding of Christian experience.

1) As is the case with all writers who are influenced more by Hebrew than by Hellenistic thought, Paul's anthropological terms view man as a whole from different aspects rather than by subdividing him into different parts. *Sarx* then is an aspectual or relational term rather than a partitive term—man is flesh, not, man has flesh. Man as flesh is man in his creatureliness, in his weakness (see e.g. Rom. 3,20, 1. Cor. 15,50, 2. Cor. 7,5, Gal. 1,16)<sup>44</sup>.

2) *Soma* and *sarx* overlap in meaning in that both can refer to the physical body, man in his physical relationships (see particularly Rom. 8,13, 1. Cor. 6,16). But where *soma* is generally a neutral concept, *sarx* regularly has negative connotations. *Soma* denotes man in the world; *sarx* denotes man belonging to the world. *Soma* can be used negatively, but almost always the negative connotation is given by the qualifying adjective or phrase (e.g. mortal body—Rom. 6,12, 8,11; body of sin—Rom. 6,6); whereas *sarx* is more regularly negative in itself without a qualifying phrase<sup>45</sup>. *Sarx* by itself means mortal body, body dominated by weakness and corruptibility; *sarx* by itself means body of sin, body ruled by sin. When Paul wants a pejorative contrast he uses *kata sarka*, not *kata soma*. Two examples bring out this relationship between *soma* and *sarx* most clearly: Col. 1,22, 2,11, where Paul speaks of "the body

<sup>43</sup>See particularly J. D. Hester, *Paul's Concept of Inheritance* (1968), pp. 96-103.

<sup>44</sup>See Bultmann, *Theology*, p. 233; W. D. Stacey, *The Pauline View of Man* (1956), pp. 154ff.; Schweizer (n. 28), pp. 125ff.; A. Sand, *Der Begriff "Fleisch" in den paulinischen Hauptbriefen* (1967), chap. 5.

<sup>45</sup>Paul never quite says that *sarx* itself is evil; see Dunn, *Jesus—Flesh and Spirit, an Exposition of Romans 1,3-4: Journ. Theol. Stud.* N.S. 24 (1973), p. 46, n. 1. Barrett (n. 17), p. 148, goes too far when he says of v. 18: "Here at least and at v. 25, the flesh is radically evil."

## In Rom. 7,14-25 Paul speaks in the present tense, that is, of his present experience as a Christian.

of flesh”—that is, the neutral word (body) is given a more negative connotation by qualifying it with the word “flesh”; 1. Cor. 15, where Paul asserts that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (15,50), whereas the body will be raised from the dead and/or transformed (15,44-54)—that is, man in his relatedness to this world (body) is transformed, whereas man in his belongingness to this world (flesh) is destroyed<sup>46</sup>.

3) Conversion does not mean that the flesh has been left behind. Man as a Christian is still part of this world (Rom. 6,19, 1. Cor. 1,29, 6,16, 7,28 etc.). Man as a believer still lives in some sense at least “in the flesh” (2. Cor. 10,3, Gal. 2,20, Phil. 1,22, Phm. 16). He has begun to experience the “life-giving Spirit”, that is true, but he is still “a living soul”; he belongs to the last Adam, that is true, but he is still of the stock of the first Adam (1. Cor. 15,45)<sup>47</sup>. His life in the flesh, his belongingness to this world, will not cease, cannot cease, until he becomes a spiritual body at resurrection or parousia. For his body is still at this stage a mortal body, a body of flesh. Only at the consummation will the Spirit extend his control to the body, only then will the flesh be left behind, only then will the believer’s solidarity with this present age be finally broken<sup>48</sup>.

4) This fleshliness of the believer, his belongingness to this world, is almost always something negative, something which runs counter to his relationship with the Spirit of Christ, something which hinders and prevents life in Christ coming to full expression in the present age. A majority of Pauline commentators want to separate Paul’s use of *sarx* into two clearly distinct compartments—*sarx* in a merely physical, non-pejorative sense, and *sarx* in a moral, pejorative sense<sup>49</sup>. I do not believe that such a distinction can be maintained<sup>50</sup>. *Sarx* represents a range of meaning rather than a number of discrete points—which means that the full range of meaning

<sup>46</sup>Cf. J. A. T. Robinson, *The Body* (1952), p. 31; E. Kasemann, *Perspectives on Paul* (1971), p. 25.

<sup>47</sup>See also Dunn, 1. Corinthians 15,45—Last Adam, Life-giving Spirit: Christ and Spirit (n. 20), pp. 127-41.

<sup>48</sup>Cf. Sand (n. 44), chap. 6.

<sup>49</sup>See e.g. W. D. Davies, *Paul and the Dead Sea Scrolls, Flesh and Spirit*: K. Stendhal (ed.), *The Scrolls and the New Testament* (1957), p. 163; Schweizer (n. 28), pp. 125-35.

<sup>50</sup>Dunn (n. 45), pp. 44-9.



## Conversion does not mean that the flesh has been left behind.

often lies under the surface, even when the immediate emphasis is more narrowly defined in a particular context. That is to say, even when *sarx* is used in a physical sense, there is almost always a moral overtone present; and when *sarx* is used in a moral sense, a physical connotation almost always lurks in the background. This means that almost every use of *sarx* in Paul has pejorative overtones in one degree or other, and that on no occasion of soteriological significance does Paul use *sarx* in a morally neutral sense. I can illustrate this best by a brief look at the phrase “in the flesh”. In Rom. 7,5 and 8,9 Paul uses the phrase in a pejorative sense of the life he converts no longer lead. But elsewhere he uses it of the believer’s present life (2. Cor. 10,3, Gal. 2,20, Phil. 1,22,24, Phm. 16) in a less hostile way, but still denoting the weakness and inferiority of the present condition by way of antithesis to life “in the Lord”, life “with Christ”. The fact that Paul can use “in the flesh”





## The believer, even as a believer, is a divided man, a man at war with himself.

with such a sweep of meaning indicates that he did not draw a clear line of distinction between a living "in the flesh" which is inevitable and a living "in the flesh" which is blameworthy. In other words, life in the flesh and life according to the flesh merge into each other and cannot easily be distinguished in Pauline thought. Even Christ's earthly life can be described as *kata sarka* (Rom. 1,3)<sup>51</sup>.

5) It follows from this that the believer, even as believer, is a divided man, a man at war with himself. As a man of the Spirit he is at war with himself as a man of flesh. It is important to grasp what this means for Paul. It does not mean that sometimes the believer acts as a man of the Spirit (*kata pneuma*) and only sometimes does he act as a man of flesh (*kata sarka*). It is not a case of either-or, one or other. It is rather a case of both-and. For since he belongs to the world as flesh, even as a believer, so everything he does, even at the Spirit's prompting, is conditioned and determined in some degree or other by the flesh. It is not possible for the believer to escape his fleshness, and to live a life of unalloyed good even for an instant so long as this age lasts. All his high ideals and aims as a Christian are all in greater or less degree misdirected or frustrated by his flesh. He must of course constantly choose to live *kata pneuma* and to resist life *kata sarka*, putting to death the deeds of the body by the power of the Spirit (Rom. 8,13), but that is a war he cannot win so long as the body is the body of flesh. So long as he is "in

<sup>51</sup>This is the thesis argued in Dunn (n. 45). Other occasions where *sarx* is used pejoratively of Christians include particularly 1. Cor. 3, 1ff., 2. Cor. 7,1, Gal. 3,3. Cf. Stacey (n. 44), p. 162: "an automatic association between life in the flesh and sin (Rom. 7,5, 8,8, 2. Cor. 7,1, etc.)."

the flesh", his life as a believer is a life of tension, a life of frustration.

This aspect of Paul's soteriology comes to clear expression in Gal. 5,16f.: "Walk by the Spirit and do not fulfil the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit and (the desires of) the Spirit are against the flesh; for each is in conflict with the other, so that what you will to do you cannot do." Here quite evidently Christian experience is depicted as a conflict between flesh and Spirit, a conflict that is between the believer's desires as a man of this age and the compulsion of the Spirit. Most striking of all is the last clause of v. 17: the conflict takes place, "hina you may not do what you want to do". The *hina* could be taken in a final sense ("in order that")<sup>52</sup>. But final *hina* makes for a very compressed sense; and does Paul intend to say that the Spirit fights against the flesh in order to prevent the believer doing what he wants to do (cf. Rom. 7,15f., 18-21)? More appropriate to the movement of thought is *hina* with consecutive force—"so that what you will to do you cannot do" (NEB)<sup>53</sup>. That is to say, the two dimensions of the believer's existence run counter to each other and prevent his living wholly in one or other; the Spirit prevents his fleshly desires coming to effect, but so too does his fleshliness prevent the Spirit inspired desires coming to effect. In consequence the believer finds himself torn in two by conflicting desires and impulses, and his experience as a man of Spirit in the flesh is one of continuing frustration.

As our earlier exegesis suggested, we have in Rom.

<sup>52</sup>Burton (n. 20), pp. 301f.; H. Schlier, *Der Brief an die Galater* (1965), p. 249; F. Mussner, *Der Galaterbrief* (1974), p. 377.

<sup>53</sup>M. L. Lagrange, *Epître aux Galates* (1950), pp. 147f.; Oepke (n. 20), pp. 135f.; P. Bonnard, *L'Épître de Saint Paul aux Galates* (1953), p. 113; C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek* (21959), p. 142; J. Eckert, *Die urchristliche Verkündigung im Streit zwischen Paulus und seinen Gegnern nach dem Galaterbrief* (1971), p. 137 and n. 1.

<sup>54</sup>On the divided "I" of Rom. 7,14-25, cf. Bultmann (n. 5), p. 178, "Man is the split"; Bornkamm (n. 11), pp. 96ff.; Kuss (n. 1), p. 563; T. W. Manson, *On Paul and John* (1963), p. 44; Conzelmann (n. 11), pp. 234f.; Eichholz (n. 29), pp. 258f.

7,14-25 that man in conflict with himself<sup>54</sup>, in fact a man in the throes of the very conflict just described. To be sure Paul expresses himself in very strong terms: 7, 14—"I am fleshly, sold under sin"; 7,23—"captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members". But this is because the believer even as believer is fleshly, and as a man of flesh is indeed sold under sin, experiencing a captivity to the law of sin which will not be finally broken till the flesh where sin makes its headquarters is destroyed in death and in the resurrection of the body. In these verses what in fact comes to the surface is Paul's consciousness of the two-sided nature and paradox of the believer's present condition, the consciousness of his fleshness, of his belonging to the world as flesh—even as a believer. It is this consciousness which rends the cry from his throat in 7,24—"Miserable creature that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"—the cry not so much of despair<sup>55</sup> as of *frustration*—the frustration of one who has to try to follow the leading of the Spirit while still in the flesh, the anguish of trying to express the life of the Spirit through the body of death, the longing to be free of the tension between old humanity and new, the longing for the life of the Spirit to have a spiritual body as its embodiment and means of expression (cf. Rom. 8,22f., 2. Cor. 5,4). In a word, it is not the cry of the non-Christian for the freedom of the Christian; rather it is the cry of the *Christian* for the full freedom of Christ<sup>56</sup>.

Some of course have jibbed at such an interpretation of Paul's soteriology. For them the logic of Paul's thought indicates that the coming of the Spirit meant the end of the flesh and of life in the flesh. Thus, for example, W. Bousset could speak of Paul's "consciousness of the perfection of his present Christian state"; "the natural being has completely died in him"<sup>57</sup>. Schweitzer could write, "As a consequence of being in the Spirit, believers are raised above the limitations of being-in-the-flesh"<sup>58</sup>. And Windisch could maintain that the Pauline imperative was a mere stylistic form, that after all he did hold an "ethic of sinlessness"<sup>59</sup>. This indeed is the logical corollary to the view that Rom. 7,14-25 and Rom. 8,1ff. speak of quite different conditions. Kummel of course and existentialist interpretations have attempted to drive a middle path between these alternatives—that is, in effect, that the man of Rom. 8 may be threatened by the condition of Rom. 7, may on occasion lapse into the condition of Rom. 7, but otherwise lives solely *kata pneuma* and not at all

*kata sarka*<sup>60</sup>. But thus to weaken the antithesis of Rom. 8,4ff. is to undercut the contrast between Rom. 7 and Rom. 8 on which Kummel's whole case was built, without making the case any more plausible. For in fact there is no middle way. Either the believer has to all intents and purposes left the flesh behind, and Paul maintains a form of gnostic dualism and perfectionism; or the believer is still in the flesh, still in all too real a sense a man of flesh, still experiencing the dominion of sin in an integral dimension of his present existence. As exegetes of Paul we have no choice but to accept the latter alternative as the truer exposition of his thought on this point, and to accept that Rom. 7,14-25 is integral to Pauline soteriology.

### 3.

We turn now to the other aspect of Christian experience particularly relevant to the exposition of Rom. 7,14-25—that is, Paul's understanding of Christian experience as a continuing experience of *death* as well as of life. I have elaborated this insight into Paul's religious experience elsewhere<sup>61</sup>, and need not go into much detail. But some grasp of this motif in Pauline soteriology is necessary if we are to understand Paul's talk of death, "the body of death" in Rom. 7,24 and 8,10.

So far as Paul is concerned, Christian experience in the present is characterized by weakness, suffering and death—that this is inevitable in the present age, and indeed is to be not merely accepted as such, but also rejoiced in, for such experience is the necessary concomitant to the experience of the Spirit in the present, and an indispensable part of the process of salvation. Reference to only a few key passages should be sufficient to demonstrate the point.

1) Rom. 8,17—" . . . if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided that (eiper) we suffer with him in order that (hina) we may also be glorified with him". Suffering is the way to glory—suffering is necessary if the sonship of the present is to become the full sonship of the future<sup>62</sup>. This is why of course Paul rejoices in his sufferings (Rom. 5,3), because he sees in them the expression of *life*. Suffering is not some defect in God's way of salvation—it is part of the saving process itself. Suffering is the necessary outworking of the Not yet of salvation, the inevitable consequence of trying to live *kata pneuma* while

<sup>54</sup>Against particularly Mitton (n. 10), p. 101; Leenhardt (n. 9), p. 182. Cf. Cranfield (n. 8), p. 366.

<sup>56</sup>I do not think with Nygren (n. 8), pp. 296f., 302f., that Rom. 7,14-25 is really dealing with the question of attaining righteousness by the law, but rather with the fact of sin as a continuing reality in the life of the believer.

<sup>57</sup>W. Bousset, *Kyrios Christos* (repr. 1970), pp. 170, 174.

<sup>58</sup>A. Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (1931), p. 167.

<sup>59</sup>H. Windisch, *Das Problem des paulinischen imperativs*: Zs. ntl. Wiss. 23 (1924), pp. 265-71.

<sup>60</sup>Cf. Kummel (n. 1), pp. 98ff.; Mitton (n. 10), p. 132; Kertelge (n. 20), pp. 112ff.; Kasemann (n. 13), p. 187: "in der Ruckschau auf die eigene Vergangenheit unter dem Gesetz erfährt der Pneumatiker die Wahrheit über sein 'Einst' und die noch von seinem weltlichen Dasein hergegebene religiöse Bedrohung seines 'Jetzt' in der Kontinuität Adams." Cf. also H. Jonas, *Philosophical Meditation on the Seventh Chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Romans*: J. M. Robinson (ed.), *The Future of our Religious Past, Essays in Honour of R. Bultmann* (1971), pp. 333-50.

<sup>61</sup>Dunn (n. 40), p. 55.

<sup>62</sup>Cf. Kasemann (n. 13), p. 219.

still "in the flesh".

2) 2. Cor. 12,9—" 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' I will all the more gladly boast of my weakness, that (hina) the power of Christ may rest upon me." Against the false apostles of Corinth who obviously maintained that divine power and human weakness were antithetical, that the Already swallowed up the Not yet, that Spirit left no room for flesh, Paul insists that divine power manifests itself precisely as power in weakness<sup>63</sup>. God's power does not drive out human weakness; on the contrary, it only comes to its full strength through weakness. The paradox of Already/Not yet, of Spirit and flesh is not surmounted. The tension dare not be abandoned or slackened, for therein lies disaster. For it is only when I am weak that I am strong (12,10).

3) The clearest expression of Paul's thought on this point is probably 2. Cor. 4,7-5,5, in particular vv. 10ff.—". . . always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, in order that (hina) the life of Jesus also may be revealed in our mortal flesh. For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, in order that (hina) the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you." Two thoughts are linked together here. First, that the experience of suffering is the experience of the power of death continually asserting itself over its continuing domain—the flesh, the mortal body, the body of death. Second, that if the life of Jesus is to achieve visible expression in the believer's present existence, that can only be through the body—but that means through this body, the body of flesh. Paul links these two thoughts by hina: death must have its say in the believer's present experience in order that the life of Jesus may come to visible expression also; the life of Jesus manifests itself precisely in and through the dying of the body; life and death are two sides of the one process. Here indeed is the paradox of Christian existence—death is a power which claims man and so is antithetical to the Spirit; at the same time it is essential that it should continue to assert its power over the flesh if the life of the Spirit is to win out in the end<sup>64</sup>.

4) Phil. 3,10f.—". . . that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection of the dead." Here again it becomes plain that for Paul religious experience is an experience not only of life but of suffering and death. Notice that he does not think of suffering as a temporary antecedent to resurrection power; on the contrary, he mentions the experience of suffering and death after the talk of experiencing resurrection power. That is

<sup>63</sup>Cf. e.g. G. Stahlin, *Theol. Wort.* 1 (1933), p. 491; E. Kasemann, *Die Legitimität des Apostels*: *Zs. ntl. Wiss.* 41 (1942), pp. 53f.; G. O'Collins, *Power Made Perfect in Weakness* (2. Cor. 12,9-10): *Cathol. Bibl. Quart.* 33 (1971), pp. 535f.

<sup>64</sup>Cf. H. Windisch, *Der Zweite Korintherbrief* (1924), pp. 144f.

**God's power does not drive out human weakness; on the contrary, it only comes to its full strength through weakness.**

to say, experience of resurrection power does not leave suffering and death behind; on the contrary, the power of Christ's resurrection manifests itself precisely in and through the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. Both sides of the death-life paradox remain in full force in the believer's experience till the end; he must experience the full outworking of death as well as of life if (ei pos) he is to experience the resurrection from the dead<sup>65</sup>.

"The body of death" (Rom. 7,24) is man as flesh, man in his frailty, mortality, corruptibility, man as heading for a death which he cannot escape. "The body is dead because of sin" (8,10), because death entered the world through sin, as the consequence and outcome of sin (5,12). Here it becomes evident that "death" for Paul has a spectrum of meaning similar to that of sarx—that is, it includes both a physical connotation (death of the body) and a moral connotation (man as sinner dead to God, the believer as having the responsibility to kill the deeds of the body—8,13). The death and dying which Paul welcomes is a complex experience of the frailty and corruption of the physical and the suffering of persecution, of the deadness of one dimension of the personality through sin and the mortification of selfishness. He welcomes it because this dying is for him a participation in Christ's sufferings, a growing conformity even to Christ's death, and so holds promise of a growing participation in Christ's resurrection power and ultimate resurrection like his. It is the recognition of this spectrum of meaning of both sarx and "death" in Paul's thought that enables us to appreciate more fully the paradox of Christian experience for Paul. For that paradox comes to one of its sharpest expressions in the double attitude Paul seems to adopt towards flesh and death. On the one hand the flesh is a continuing source of danger and of potential disaster, and death is the last enemy. But on the other hand, the flesh is the place where the

**Both sides of the death-life paradox remain in full force in the believer's experience till the end.**

<sup>65</sup>Cf. J. Gnlika, *Der Philipperbrief* (1968), pp. 196f.



life of Jesus and the divine power comes to its fullest experience, and death is part of the experience of that life and power. This is the complexity of the believer's experience of Spirit and resurrection life in the present—for the Spirit manifests himself in flesh and through flesh and yet as opposed to flesh, and life manifests itself in death and through death and yet as opposed to death. It is this complexity which underlies the paradox of Christian experience so vividly depicted in Rom. 7, 14-25.

\* \* \*

If we have rightly understood Pauline soteriology, certain *corollaries* follow and are worthy of mention.

a) First, we must preserve the Already/Not yet balance in Paul's soteriology: conversion is a decisive event of the past, something new has entered the believer's experience and begun to have a determinative influence on his life; but, conversion is only a beginning, the new has not yet wholly swallowed up the old, there is still a significant degree of continuity between man's state prior to faith and his state under faith. In particular, this means that we should not attempt to abstract Paul's talk of conversion-initiation as an event of dying in the past from the Already/Not yet paradox. When Paul says, "We died to sin" (Rom. 6,2ff., Gal. 2,19, Col. 2,11ff.,20, 3,3), he does not mean that the believer is no longer a man of flesh, that death is an event past and gone in the believer's experience<sup>66</sup>. He is simply emphasizing the Already aspect of the believer's condition—just as elsewhere he emphasizes the Not yet aspect by stressing that death is part of the believer's continuing experience (e.g. Rom. 8,10,2. Cor. 4,10ff., Phil. 3,10f.). Death, like salvation, redemption, adoption, etc., belongs to the Not yet as well as to the Already<sup>67</sup>. The dying of conversion-initiation therefore is only the beginning of a process, a process of dying of the old fleshly nature and dying to the old fleshly nature, a life-long process which will not be completed till the resurrection or transformation of the body. Thus also the sharp and keen antitheses in Rom. 8,4ff. do not indicate that the struggle between flesh and Spirit is already finished, but rather they underline the importance of prosecuting the war against the flesh to life's end (8,12f.). This is why in Romans, Galatians and Colossians Paul follows up the earlier bolder statements about conversion with exhortations which on the face of it seem to contradict them. So, for example, Rom. 6,11 does not mean, "Pretend that you are dead to sin; assume that you can no longer sin"; but rather, recognize the death at work in you and the life at work in you and choose the

## We must preserve the Already/Not yet balance in Paul's soteriology.

death and life of the Spirit rather than the life and death of the flesh (cf. Gal. 5,16ff., Col. 3,5ff.). Paul was neither gnostic nor perfectionist in his soteriology.

b) Second, there is no escape possible for the believer from his divided condition in this life—the cry of anguished frustration in Rom. 7,24 is the life-long cry of the Christian. Neither conversion, nor any other experience of the Spirit in this life raises the believer above this life-death tension, this Spirit-flesh warfare. The Spirit does not bring the wretched man's struggle to an end; on the contrary, his presence and activity in the believer heightens the conflict. There is no higher experience which exempts the believer from the reality of his divided state as man of Spirit and man of flesh; so long as the believer remains in the flesh he cannot enjoy the full life of the Spirit. There are only two ways of escape, and both are ways of death: one is the way forward—to engage in the Spirit/flesh conflict till its end in physical death; the other is the way backward—to abandon the conflict, to retreat into a life lived solely on the level of the flesh, the level where death alone reigns, the way of death. In short, the only way of escape is death—either the death of the body, or the death of the whole man.

c) Thirdly, it follows from this recognition of the nature of Christian experience that apostasy is a real possibility and danger for the Christian. We must take a passage like Rom. 8,13 with the seriousness it deserves: Paul warns his fellow Christians, "If you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live". The choice here presented to the believer is no artificial, academic one. It is possible for the Christian to live his whole life *kata sarka*; if he does so, if he abandons the struggle and reverts to a solely fleshly existence, he will die; he will not know the daily renewal of the Spirit towards wholeness, but instead only the daily deterioration of the flesh towards destruction. Only if and as he prosecutes the struggle between Spirit and flesh, only as he lets the Spirit have a say in the shaping of his daily life, only then will he know that process of transformation from one degree of glory to another which in the end will make him like Christ (cf. 2. Cor. 3,18).

<sup>66</sup>Against Dodd (n. 18), p. 108.

<sup>67</sup>Cf. particularly R. C. Tannehill, *Dying and Rising with Christ* (1967).

d) Fourthly, it may not be inappropriate to draw attention to a pastoral corollary of some significance. If we have understood Paul aright, and if Rom. 7,14-25 is a valid insight into Christian experience, then we must not hide or ignore this. Proclamation of a gospel which promises only pardon, peace and power will result in converts who sooner or later become disillusioned or deceitful about their Christian experience. If Rom. 7,14-25 is a transcript of Christian experience, then any gospel which ignores it is unrealistic and in the end counter-productive. Furthermore, pastoral counselling of Christians should remember that paradox and conflict is an integral part of religious experience. The believer need not be depressed at defeat nor conclude that grace has lost the struggle. On the contrary, spiritual conflict is the sign of life—a sign that the Spirit is having his say in the shaping of character. Since life now must be life in this body of flesh, the Spirit can be present only as paradox and conflict. Consequently it is this paradox and conflict which is the mark of healthy religious experience—not its absence. “The Spirit is absent when we stop fighting, not when we lose<sup>68</sup>.”

To sum up then, in no other place does Paul describe so fully the moral experience of the Christian as in Rom. 7,14-25. In these verses the believer's experience is clearly depicted as an experience of warfare between flesh and Spirit. It is not a warfare from which the believer can distance himself and in which he can take sides as though he were a neutral observer or umpire. On the contrary, he finds himself on *both sides*; even as believer he lives on both levels, flesh and Spirit, at the same time; the division runs right through the believing “I”. It is because he lives on two levels at once that he has constantly to choose between the two levels—flesh or Spirit. “I” in my “inner man”, as renewed mind, as man of Spirit, have to choose against “I” as flesh, as body of death. And even when, by the power of the Spirit, “I” may choose against the flesh, even then “I” still remain a prisoner of the flesh, captive to sin, and my good is frustrated and distorted. Yet, despite this, hope remains, for the presence of the Spirit, and the will to good is a beginning of the process of redemption, a process of salvation which is accomplished precisely by means of the conflict, not by ending it, precisely by holding the tension of the paradox of life and death, Spirit and flesh, firm to the end, not by its resolution before then. In short, if Rom. 7,24 is the believer's life-long cry of frustration, 7,25a is his thanksgiving of eschatological hope, and 7,25b his calm realism for the present in the light of both.

**Proclamation of a gospel which promises only pardon, peace and power will result in converts who sooner or later become disillusioned or deceitful about their Christian experience.**

**The believer need not be depressed at defeat nor conclude that grace has lost the struggle. On the contrary, spiritual conflict is the sign of life—a sign that the Spirit is having his say in the shaping of character.**

<sup>68</sup>H. Berkhof, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (1965), p. 78.

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