

ROMANS 7:7-25, THE EXPERIENCE OF SINNERS.

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Notwithstanding the limited space for this article the writer trusts that it may be both doctrinally and practically helpful.

I. THE UNSAVED SAY THEY DO WHAT THEY WOULD NOT DO AND DO NOT WHAT THEY WOULD; AND ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THEY ARE "CAPTIVES" IN AND TO SIN.

The following are but a few of the wailings of despair from sinners, as found in literature:

Ovid:—"My reason this, my passion that persuades;
I see the wrong, I approve it too;
Condemn the wrong, and yet the wrong pursue."

Horace:—"More in my mind than body lies my pains:
What'er may hurt me, I joy pursue,
What'er may do me good, with horror view."

Arrian:—"For truly he who sins does not will to sin, but wishes to walk uprightly; yet it is manifest that what he wills he doth not, and what he wills not he doth."

Euripides:—"But I am overcome by sin,
And I well understand the evil which I presume to commit.
Passion, however, is more powerful than my reason;
Which is the cause of the greatest evils to mortal man."

Cowper:—"Weak and irresolute man;
The purpose of to-day,
Woven with pains into his plan
To-morrow rends away.
The bow well bent and smart the spring,
Vice seems already slain;
But passion rudely snaps the string,
And it revives again."

These citations are taken from Adam Clarke's Commentary on Rom. 7, and from *The Moral Conflict of Humanity*, by Dr. A. C. Kendrick—as made by them to show that sinners are described in Rom. 7:25. In his Commentary, to the same effect, Tholuck cites others. To the same effect, who has forgotten the words in the old song that so well describes his experience as an awakened but yet unsaved sinner:—

“My grief a burden long has been
Because I could not cease from sin.
The more I strove against its power
I sinned and stumbled but the more.”

Even Rousseau, a notoriously immoral infidel, despairingly said: “I do evil but I love good.” So truly is the sinner's experience in Rom. 7:25 that Dr. A. C. Kendrick, one of the greatest of Greek scholars, of Bible commentators and Theologians, uses the words: “Is not the literature of the world, is not the experience of humanity written all over with the proofs of the rebellion of the subject reason against the tyrant lust? We need not fill our pages with classical literature to illustrate this point. The whole daily experience of mankind but illustrates this.”—*The Moral Conflict of Humanity*, p. 21.

The foregoing in other words do but utter what Paul says: “That which I do I allow not, but what I hate that I do. * * * * When I would do good evil is present with me. * * * I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind (*noos*), and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members,” etc., etc. If these and their accompanied words of Paul express the experience of the Christian, then the like expressions of heathen, of infidels and of other sinners entitle them to the claim of Christian experience. These citations and the words of Paul describe: first, sinners under conviction of sin; second, sinners who approve and want to do right; third, sinners who are groaning slaves in sin and to Satan. If Paul describes here sinners, pray, what is the difference between being redeemed and delivered from the “captivity” of sin and yet in this “captivity”; between being a Christian and being an unsaved sinner; be-

tween the moral struggles of the freeman and the moral struggles of the slave?

II. THE BIBLE DESCRIPTIONS OF THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE CHRISTIAN AND THE SINNER, IN OUTWARD AS WELL AS IN INWARD LIFE.

The comparatively few example-citations I make clearly show that the experience of Rom. 7:7-25, and of the foregoing citations, cannot be that of a Christian. Please read the context of these citations, to see that they describe the outward as well as the inward life of the Christian:

1. The sinner sold to Satan and to sin. "Ye have sold yourselves."—Isa. 52:3. The Christian redeemed. "Christ hath redeemed us."—Gal. 3:13.

2. Sinners "themselves in the snare of the devil who are taken captive by him at his will".—2 Tim. 2:26. Christians delivered "from the power (*exousia*—authority) of Satan unto God".—Acts 26:18.

3. The sinner "walks" "in darkness"—John 8:12. The Christian "walks" "in the light". So much so that "If we say we have fellowship with him, and walk in the darkness, we lie, and DO NOT THE TRUTH",—exactly what the person Paul describes in Rom. 7:19 does not, but does the contrary.—1 John 1:6-7.

4. The sinner is "in the flesh".—Rom. 8:8. The Christian is "not in the flesh". "But ye are not in the flesh".—Rom. 8:9.

5. The sinner is "in the flesh" instead of being "in the Spirit".—Rom. 8:9. The Christian instead of being "in the flesh" is "in the Spirit".—Rom. 8:9.

6. The sinner does "the lust of the flesh". The sinner's "conversation * * * in the lust of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh".—Eph. 2:3. The Christian has "crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts".—Gal. 5:24.

7. The sinner "walks after the flesh".—2 Pet. 2:10. The Christian walks "not after the flesh, but after the Spirit".—Rom. 8:4.

8. The sinner "walks after the flesh" instead of walking

after the Spirit.—Rom. 8:4. Instead of walking “after the flesh” the Christian “walks not after the flesh, but after the Spirit”.—Rom. 6:18.

9. As “servants” to sin in bondage to sin.—Rom. 6:16; Acts 8:23. The Christian has been “made free from sin”.—Rom. 6:18.

10. Instead of being the “servant of righteousness” the sinner is the “servant of sin”.—Rom. 8:18. Instead of being the “servant of sin” the Christian is the “servant of righteousness”.—Rom. 6:18.

11. Sinners “do service to” idols.—Gal. 4:8. Christians are “turned to God from idols to serve the living and the true God”.—1 Thess. 1:9; Philip. 3:3.

12. Sinners “worship the creature”.—Rom. 1:25. Christians worship God.—Philip. 3:3.

13. Sinners “do not obey the truth”.—Rom. 2:8. Christians “obey” the truth.—Rom. 2:7-8.

14. Sinners disobey God.—Rom. 10:21; Tit. 1:16; Eph. 2:2. Christians “obey” God.—Heb. 5:9.

15. Sinners “sow” to their “flesh”.—Gal. 6:8. Christians “sow to the Spirit”.—Gal. 6:8.

16. Sinners “deny” Christ.—Matt. 10:33. Christians “confess” Him.—Matt. 10:32.

17. Sinners “bear” evil “fruits”.—Rom. 7:5. Christians “bear” “good fruit”.—Rom. 6:5-6.

18. Sinners live their past sinful life—“because they have no changes they fear not God”.—Psa. 55:19; Gen. 6:5. Christians show that “the time past may suffice” “to have wrought the will of the Gentiles” in sin.—1 Pet. 4:3; Rom. 6:7; Eph. 2:2-3.

19. Sinners cannot “please God”.—Rom. 8:7. Christians “do those things that are pleasing in His sight”.—1 John 3:22.

20. Sinners give their bodies to sin.—Compare Rom. 1:24; 5:13; Eph. 2:2-3, by which we see that sinners before their salvation has been effected are bodily slaves to sin. The *bodies* of Christians are the “servants” to righteousness. “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body.” “Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God.” “Glorify God in your

body"; "that the life of Christ might be manifest in our mortal flesh".—Compare Rom. 6:12; 8:10; 12:1; 1 Cor. 6:20; 2 Cor. 4:10; Philip. 1:10; 1 Thess. 5:23.

21. The sinner's "body" the "house" in which the devil lives.—Luke 11:24. The Christian's "body" "the temple of God".—1 Cor. 3:16-17; Rom. 8:11.

22. The sinner's "body" rules him, leading him to serve "divers lusts and pleasures".—Compare Rom. 1:24, 6:13; Eph. 2:3; 1 Pet. 2:3; Tit. 3:3. With Paul the Christian says: "I keep my body under".—Compare Jas. 4:2; Rom. 6:12; 8:13; Col. 2:5, 9; 1 Cor. 9:27; 6:20.

23. The sinner's life proves him lost. "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are whom ye obey."—Rom. 6:16; 1 John 2:4; 3:10. The life of the Christian proves him saved. "Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are whom ye obey."—Rom. 6:16. "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them he it is that loveth me." "He that saith I know him and keepeth not his commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him." "They profess to know God, but in works they deny him, being abominable and disobedient, and to every good work reprobate."—Compare John 14:21; Rom. 6:16; 1 John 3:3-4; Tit. 1:10.

The foregoing, in part comparison of the differences between the sinner and the Christian, clearly shows that the sinner, first, is *characterized* by a life of outward, as well as inward, sin; that the Christian—while not perfect—is *characterized* by an outward life of righteousness. Second, that the sinner is a slave, in captivity to sin and Satan, so that he "cannot please God"; that the Christian is "free" or the glad, willing servant to righteousness—to Christ. The body of the sinner serves sin and Satan; the body of the Christian serves righteousness and Christ. The Christian the happy servant and captive to Christ; the sinner the miserable servant and captive to sin and Satan. With this before you, judge whether the Christian is *characterized* as "carnal, sold under sin", doing that he "would not and not doing that he would; and in "captivity" to a body that instead of being kept under

and glorifying God (1 Cor. 9:27; 6:20) keeps "the inward man" under and in Satan's service. The descriptions of the sinner and the Christian throughout the Bible, and the life of outward service of Paul to Christ, absolutely render it impossible for Paul to have described the Christian as "sold under sin"—in "captivity", like any slave, under the yoke of Satan by the power and the medium of a body wholly unredeemed and in the service of Satan. On Rom. 8:11 Neander, with other Biblical scholars, rightly says: "The Spirit of Christ that dwells in them" (in the Christians' bodies) "constantly dominates their bodies afresh as his organ, so that the members consecrated to God, are employed in his service".—Planting and Training of the Christian Church, p. 430. What an interpretation—the body, the "temple of God", that with which the Christian "glorifies God", the "living sacrifice to God", without which we cannot serve him on earth, made, by a perversion of Paul's language in Rom. 7, to make the Christian *practice sin—habitually* in outward life—to make him serve the devil!!

III. DIFFICULTIES THOUGHT TO MILITATE AGAINST ROMANS SEVENTH NOT MEANING THE CHRISTIAN.

In noticing these difficulties be it noted that no amount of man-made difficulties can make Paul say the Christian's *habitual life or practice*, though he is not sinless, is doing that he would not and not doing that he would.

1. It is urged that Paul uses the present tense in Rom. 7: 14-24.

A great Baptist scholar, Dr. A. C. Kendrick, sufficiently answers this: "The use of the present, however, in delineating a past scene is one of the commonest figures in rhetoric, and springs out of the most natural laws of the human mind."—*The Moral Conflict of Humanity*, p. 32. See also Winer's *N. T. Gram.*, p. 266. As to why Paul changes from the past to the present tense, in verse 14, the answer is, when he comes to verse 1, he arises to such a warmth of soul that, like in chapter 9:3, he feels the sinner's slavery so that he places,

rhetorically, himself in his place. For the rule in Greek for this see Winer's *N. T. Gram.*, p. 266; Bengelum.

2. It is urged that Paul says that the character here delights "in the law of God after the inward man". To this, Dr. A. C. Kendrick rightly replies: "He does not talk about delighting in the law of God; the word which he employs has no such vividness and glow of meaning. It is simply (*sunedomai*) *to be pleased with, to have pleasure in*, and does little more than to take the act out of the sphere of the intellectual or moral approval. It is less strong than *perpomai*, *delight myself*, or *agallomai*, *exult*, but even than *kairo*, *rejoice*. It is a somewhat heightened expression of the *consent to*, give my sanction to, of verse 16, and in both cases the apostle uses decisive terms, partly because he wishes to emphasize the mind's vindication of the law, and partly because the stronger the testimony of the moral reason to the excellency of virtue, the more odious and formidable appears the enslaving power of sin. A similar principle explains the *I hate* used of the sentiment with which he regards the course in which his sin-enthralled appetites impel him."—*Moral Conflict of Humanity*, pp. 34, 35. Bagster's, Liddel and Scott's, and Greenfield's Lexicons agree with Dr. Kendrick that the word means approval.

3. As to Paul here speaking of the approval of the "inward man", Thayer's *Lex.* defines the "inward man" as the soul, the conscience; Greenfield's, "The mind, the conscience". A Clarke, on verse 22, cites approvingly, a "pious and sensible writer": "The inward man always signifies the mind; which either may or may not be the subject of grace." Dr. A. C. Kendrick: "The inner man is his (*nous*) mind, intelligence, reason, not anything that is characteristically Christian."—*The Moral Conflict of Humanity*, p. 36. So Julius Muller's *Chr. Doc. of Sin*, vol. 2, p. 247. These citations are sufficient to show that the "inward man" of Paul, to say the least, does not necessarily mean a regenerate man. Dr. Kendrick: "The Spirit of God dwelling in the Christian has regenerated and made him spiritual. This is his appropriate description. His proper warfare is a war of the flesh against the Spirit. Here

the warfare is the flesh against the reason. The law of the mind is in unequal conflict with the law of sin. There is no trace of that spiritual being which the New Testament everywhere ascribes to the Christian. * * * * The person has never been lifted into a higher than his native element, never been furnished with supernatural weapons, never endowed with aught higher than his natural sentiments of right and duty, for carrying on the conflict. Hence the heaven wide difference between the two conflicts. The one of the flesh and the one of the Spirit, in which the Spirit is systematically and steadily triumphant. The other of the flesh and the moral reason, in which the reason is permanently enthralled."—Idem, pp. 36-37.

In the beginning of this article were cited many lamentations of despair from heathen, infidel and others; exactly as the sinner's lamentation in Rom. 7 and especially in verses 14 to 24 expresses his conflict and utter defeat. Indeed, there is no Christian who has not found this his despairing conflict of mind and conscience, before his conversion—so well expressed in that old experimental song:

"My grief a burden long has been because *I could not cease from sin.*

The more I strove against its power I sinned and stumbled but the more."

The next lines of the song are but the expression of the turn of the conflict, began in verse 25, swelling out in the victorious expressions of Romans eighth chapter:

"Till late I heard my Savior say, come hither soul, I am the way," etc.

"But we are not in the flesh"; we "walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit"; we "through the Spirit do mortify the deed of the body"; we "are debtors not to the flesh to live after the flesh"; we "are led by the Spirit of God" and "are the sons of God" and have not "received the spirit of bondage again to fear"; "the Spirit helpeth our infirmities"; "who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect"; "we know that all things work together for good to them that love God".

Or, as in chapter 6:2, 7, 12, 14, "How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein. * * * For he that is dead to sin is *freed* from sin. * * * Let not sin therefore *reign* in your mortal *body*, that ye should obey the lusts thereof. * * * For *sin shall not have dominion over us*". As wide as heaven and earth apart are the character, the life and the state of the one described in these victorious expressions of joy from that described in chapter seven, by such expressions as: "For that which I do I allow not; but what I hate that I do"; "I am carnal, sold under sin"; "I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind" (he does not say, against my spirit—Bengel) "and BRINGING ME INTO CAPTIVITY TO THE LAW OF SIN which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" As Dr. A. C. Kendrick well says of these last cited Scriptures: "The person's situation nowhere appears darker and more hopeless than in Rom. 7:21, 23, 24. * * * The language indicates no progress towards a better condition."—Idem, p. 34. Or, as Tholuck expresses it: "The man involved in this way in an interminable discord, seeing within him a strife consuming bone and marrow, and from which he knows no way of deliverance, breaks forth in an exclamation of despair."—Com. on v. 24. Or, as Adam Clarke comments: "He does not there speak of an occasional advantage by sin, it was complete and final victory gained by corruption. * * * He was now in the hands of the foe as the victor's lawful captive. * * * When all this is considered, who, in his right mind, can apply it to the holy soul of the apostle to the Gentiles. * * * Chained to a dead body * * * , an allusion to an ancient custom of certain tyrants, who bound a dead body to a living man, and obliged him to carry it about till contagion from the putrid mass took away his life!"—In 1. Well does Dr. Julius Muller (who has written the greatest work on sin ever written outside of the Bible) ask: "And are we really to understand this of the regenerate? If so, in what does the condition of the unregenerate differ from that of the regenerate? * * * If so, how is the teaching of the apostle regarding the regenerate to be distinguished from

the views of Mani, that man has two souls, one good and the other evil?"—Chr. Doc. of Sin, vol. 1, p. 331.

Says Dr. Kendrick, speaking of the subject of Rom. 7th chapter: "That helpless slave, that wretched thrall of sin, working out in blind bewilderment the dictates of imperious lust, struggling with the chain, and at last uttering a shriek of despair, is he the man whom we now" (in Rom. 8) "behold exulting in his spiritual freedom, and producing in joyous spontaneity the fruits of righteousness? Not unless every law of language is reversed. Passing from the seventh to the eighth chapter of Romans is passing into a new atmosphere, is entering a new world. From a chaos of convulsed and conflicting elements into harmony and light and joy. No more being in the flesh; no more sold under sin; no more servile and hateful task work. * * * All this has passed away forever. It is superceded by a new state of spiritual freedom, purity and progress, of assured victory and everlasting triumph."—*Idem.*, p. 41. As Julius Muller says of Paul: "His description of the life of faith did not begin until chap. VIII."—*Christian Doc. of Sin*, vol. 1, p. 328. To cite Meyer, "the prince of exegetes, Tholuck, and a host of Biblical scholars, who see the lost in chapter 7:7-25 and the saved in chapter 8 would be easy. Tholuck says: "The more ancient teachers of the church had unanimously explained it" (the 7th chap.) "of the man who had not as yet become a Christian, nor is upheld in his struggles by the Spirit of Christ. So Origen, Tertullian, Chrysostom and Theodoret".—Tholuck on Rom., p. 211; also *Bap. Quarterly*, vol. 9, p. 385. Augustine, the father of Romish theology, is the man to whom those who believe Rom. 7th speaks of the Christian are indebted. But with the Reformation and the revival of other truths, came the revival or return to the view of the early Christians, that Rom. 7th describes the sinner.—*Bap. Quart.*, vol. 9, p. 385; Tholuck on Rom., p. 211-212; Kendrick's *Moral Conflict of Humanity*, pp. 10-11. Dr. W. N. Clarke, who has written, perhaps, the strongest for the Romish-Augustinian interpretation, concedes that "within the last half a century the most ancient interpretation has been gaining ground; and now the great ma-

majority of commentators find in the passage the experience of the unrenewed"; and Dr. Kendrick says: "The drift of recent interpretation is setting toward the earlier view. Bengel, Rukert, Meyer, DeWette, Olshausen, among the late interpreters, have returned to the views of Chrysostom and Theodoret." Tholuck says: "We believe the time is not far distant when such a judgment" (as makes Rom. 7th describe the Christian) "will be a matter of astonishment."—Bap. Quart., p. 386; *Moral Conflict of Humanity*, p. 11.

3. But the question is asked, "Do not Christians find themselves described in Rom. 7th?" I answer, So far as evil ever present, the conflict between the remnants of depravity that are in every Christian called the "flesh", as with victorious armies that while sometimes defeated are never captured and whose campaign is of only victory, Rom. 7th may describe Christians. As Bengel remarks: "Believers to a certain extent continue to carry with them something of this feeling even to the day of their death, VIII. 23."—In 1. But this is not what Paul here speaks of; this is described in Gal. 5:16-25, and contains throughout recognition of the Holy Spirit as the power and the guarantee of the Christians' victory—a thing entirely absent from the struggle in Rom. 7th. Romans 7th has the body on top; Gal. 5:16-25; 1 Cor. 9:27; 1 John 1:6, 7; 2:1, 3-5, 13; 3:3, 6-10; Rom. 6:2, 6-14 have the body under. Be sure here to stop and carefully read all these references, to see how wholly different is the Christian's struggle with the flesh from the sinner's struggle in Rom. 7th. The sad truth is, often it has been the case, that in fighting sinless perfectionism its opposite extreme has been so reached that Antinomianism and a general wreck of spirituality have been the result. On this ungodliness, sinless perfectionism fattens, as people become disgusted with the miserable, hypocritical, farcical living in our churches—in both pulpit and pew.

This leads me to conclude (leaving much out I wish I had room to write), by calling attention to the low standard of Christian and church life that is, often, the result of finding the ideal or real Christian life in Rom. 7th. Tholuck approvingly cites Adam Clarke: "This opinion" (that Rom. 7th describes

the Christian) "has most shamefully and pitifully not only lowered the standard of Christianity, but destroyed its influence and disgraced its character".—Tholuck on Rom., pp. 210, 211. Dr. W. N. Clarke, in his able defence of the position that Rom. 7th is describing the Christian, closes by attempting to prevent the bad moral and spiritual influence of his position, conceding that it has "often" effected "perpetual defeat of goodness"; and says "this is the principal objection to the passage which is here maintained"—by himself.—Bap. Quart., vol. 9, p. 410. Oh, the sad, numerous illustrations in our churches of the worldly and the immoral who seek refuge in the misinterpretation of Paul's words: "If then I do that which I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me"—perverting the meaning of Christians "not" being "under law" so as to leave them never transgressors of the law!!!! Only eternity will be able to estimate the sad results of the standard of Christian life that is born of making Rom. 7th describe the Christian life;—the sad results in the worldliness and the immorality of the Romish church, from the days when Augustine originated that interpretation to the Reformation, and wherever and whenever held elsewhere. From an ideal of Christian life in which the spirit is the manacled and driven despairing slave to the passions of a sinful body what else could we expect!!

The interpretation making John 3:9 mean that "the new nature cannot sin" has no standing at the bar of Biblical exegesis.