

# The Anatomy of a Church (18)

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[Acts 20:28](#)

(Continuation from 04/06/14)

## PERSONAL HOLINESS

### STRUGGLE AND CONFESSION: THE BELIEVER IS TO BE FREE FROM THE LAW, [Romans 7:1-25](#)

The Confessions of a Man's Struggling Soul, [Romans 7:14-25](#)

#### The First Lament

[Romans 7:14-17 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>14</sup>“For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.

<sup>15</sup> For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I *would* like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate.

<sup>16</sup> But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, *confessing* that the Law is good.

<sup>17</sup> So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

#### The Condition

[Romans 7:14 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>14</sup>“For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.”

The conjunction **for** carries the idea of *because* and indicates that Paul is not introducing a new subject but is giving a defense of what he has just said.

He begins by again affirming **that the Law** is not the problem, because it **is spiritual**.

Salvation by grace through faith does not replace or devalue **the Law**, because the law was never a means of salvation. As observed previously, [Hebrews 11](#) and many other passages of Scripture make clear that the only means of salvation has always been the provision and power of God's grace working through the channel of man's faith.

[Romans 7:14 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>14</sup>“For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.”

“**But I**,” Paul continues, “**am** still **of the flesh**. I am still earthbound and mortal.” It is important to note that the apostle does not say he is still **in the flesh** but that he is still **of** it. He has already explained that believers are no longer “**in the flesh**” ([Romans 7:5](#); cf. [Romans 8:8](#)), no longer bound by and enslaved to its sinfulness as they once were.

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**Romans 7:5 (NASB)**

<sup>5</sup> For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were *aroused* by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death.

**Romans 8:8 (NASB)**

<sup>8</sup> “And those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

The idea is that, although believers are not still in the flesh, the flesh is still in them.

In his first letter to the church at Corinth, Paul describes the Christians there as “**men of flesh,... babes in Christ**” ([1 Corinthians 3:1](#)).

**1 Corinthians 3:1 (NASB)**

<sup>1</sup> “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ.”

As the apostle confesses later in the present passage, using the present tense, “**I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh**” ([Romans 7:18](#)).

**Romans 7:18 (NASB)**

<sup>18</sup> “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good *is not*.”

Even as an apostle of Jesus Christ he possessed a remnant of the sinfulness that characterizes all human beings, including those who, in Christ, are saved from its total mastery and its condemnation.

But the Christian’s spirit, his inner self, has been completely and forever cleansed of sin. It is for that reason that, at death, he is prepared to enter God’s presence in perfect holiness and purity. Because his spiritual rebirth has already occurred, his flesh, with its remaining sin, is left behind.

Every well-taught and honest Christian is aware that his life falls far short of God’s perfect standard of righteousness and that he falls back into sin with disturbing frequency. He is no longer of his former father, the devil ([John 8:44](#));

**John 8:44 (NASB)**

<sup>44</sup> “You are of *your* father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

he no longer loves the world ([1 John 2:15](#));

**1 John 2:15 (NASB)**

<sup>15</sup> “Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

and he is no longer sin’s slave—but he is still subject to its deceit and is still attracted by many of its allurements. Yet the Christian cannot be happy with his sin, because it is contrary to his new nature and because he knows that it grieves his Lord as well as his own conscience.

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The story is told of an unbeliever who, when he heard of the gospel of salvation by grace alone, commented, **“If I could believe that salvation is free and is received only by faith, I would believe and then take my fill of sin.”** The person witnessing to him wisely replied, **“How much sin do you think it would take to fill a true Christian to satisfaction?”** His point was that a person who has not lost his appetite for sin cannot be truly converted.

**Romans 7:14 (NASB)**

<sup>14</sup>**“For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.”**

The phrase **sold into bondage to sin** has caused many interpreters to miss Paul’s point and to take those words as evidence the person being talked about is not a Christian. But Paul uses a similar phrase in **verse 23**, where he makes clear that only his members, that is, his fleshly body, is **“a prisoner of the law of sin.”**

**Romans 7:23 (NASB)**

<sup>23</sup>**“But I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.”**

That lingering part of his unredeemed humanness is still sinful and consequently makes warfare against the new and redeemed part of him, which is no longer sin’s prisoner and is now its avowed enemy.

Paul’s strong words about his condition do not indicate he was only partially saved at the time but rather emphasize that sin can continue to have dreadful power in a Christian’s life and is not to be trifled with. The believer’s battle with sin is strenuous and life-long. And as Paul also points out later in this chapter, even a Christian can truthfully say, **“I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh”** (**Romans 7:18**).

**Romans 7:18 (NASB)**

<sup>18</sup>**“For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not.”**

*In himself*, that is, in his remaining fleshly being, a Christian is no more holy or sinless than he was before salvation.

Probably many years after he became a believer, David prayed,

**Psalms 51:1-3 (NASB)**

<sup>1</sup>**“Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions.”**

<sup>2</sup>**“Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity And cleanse me from my sin.”**

<sup>3</sup>**“For I know my transgressions, And my sin is ever before me.”**

The rendering in the *New International Version* of **verse 5** of that psalm gives helpful insight: **“Surely I have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”**

**Psalms 51:5 (NASB)**

<sup>5</sup>**“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.”**

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David well understood the truth the apostle John would later proclaim to believers:

**1 John 1:8-10 (NASB)**

<sup>8</sup>“If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.”

<sup>9</sup>“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

<sup>10</sup>“If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.”

It was in that humble spirit that Isaiah, although a prophet of God, confessed as he stood before the heavenly throne:

“I am a man of unclean lips” ([Isaiah 6:5](#)).

**Isaiah 6:5 (NASB)**

<sup>5</sup>“Then I said, “Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.”

Like Isaiah, the more a Christian draws near to God, the more clearly he perceives the Lord’s holiness and his own sinfulness.

The commentator **C. E. B. Cranfield** observed, “The more seriously a Christian strives to live from grace and to submit to the discipline of the gospel, the more sensitive he becomes to... the fact that even his very best acts and activities are disfigured by the egotism which is still powerful within him—and no less evil because it is often more subtly disguised than formerly” (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975], p. 358).

**Thomas Scott**, an evangelical preacher of the Church of England in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, wrote that when a believer “compares his actual attainments with the spirituality of the law and with his own desire and aim to obey it, he sees that he is yet, to a great degree, carnal in the state of his mind, and under the power of evil propensities, from which (like a man sold for a slave) he cannot wholly emancipate himself. He is carnal in exact proportion to the degree in which he falls short of perfect conformity to the law of God” (cited in **Geoffrey B. Wilson**, *Romans: A Digest of Reformed Comment* (London: Banner of Truth, 1969], p.121).

Sin is so wretched and powerful that, even in a redeemed person, it hangs on and contaminates his living and frustrates his inner desire to obey the will of God.