

# The Wretched Man

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[ 0 : 00 ] I'm going to sing some verses from Psalm 38, Psalm 38 from the beginning down to verse 7.

In thy great indignation, O Lord, rebuke me not, nor on me lay thy chastening hand in thy displeasure hold. For in me fast thine arrow stick, thine hand doth press me sore, and in my flesh there is no health nor soundness any more. This grief I have because thy wrath is forth against me gone, and in my bones there is no rest for sin that I have done, because gone up above my head my great transgression be, and as a weighty burden they too heavy are for me.

My wounds do stink and are corrupt, my folly makes it so. I troubled an and much bow down, all day I mourning go. For a disease that loathes and tastes so fills my loins with pain, that in my weak and weary flesh no soundness doth remain. These verses from the beginning of Psalm 38, in thy great indignation, O Lord, rebuke me not.

In thy great indignation, O Lord, rebuke me not.

Nor on me lay thy chastening hand, nor on me lay thy chastening hand, in thy displeasure hold. For in every fast thine arrow stick, thine hand doth press me soar. And in my flesh there is no health nor soundness any more.

[ 2 : 49 ] This grief I have, because thy wrath is formed, thy gift is begun.

And in my hope there is no rest for sin that I have done.

Because God doth above my head, my gift is begun. Because God doth above my head, my gift is begun.

And I shall mit. And I shall bend. And I shall be many hands to me. And I shall ken essa block.

And I shall sweet lightss it be. And I shall be my star-spoken earthy. My wounds to stay and are called up, my falling-faced soul.

[ 4 : 25 ] I travel, I must have died, all day I morning go.

For I resist the no-savest, so fills my life with pain.

That in the holy week and weary bless, no sadness doth remain.

Can we turn now to the epistle of Paul to the Romans chapter 7. And we can read at verse 20.

Now if I do that, I would not. It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.

[ 5 : 54 ] For I delight in the law of God after the inward man. But I see another law in my members. Warring against the law of my mind. And bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ, O Lord. So then with the mind I myself say the law of God.

But with the flesh, the law of sin. O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this sin.

O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this sin. O wretched man that I am. Who said these words? Who said these words?

It might seem a silly question to ask. Because the words that are contained within the epistle that bears the name of the Apostle Paul.

[ 7 : 04 ] And yet, because of who Paul was, some suggest that these words were uttered by somebody else.

And Paul was simply quoting these words. It seems that they are far from the spirit that you would expect an apostle to possess.

Perhaps they are suggested by some words that were uttered by Paul, but before he was converted.

It is somebody who has a problem with sin. Perhaps unconverted, but under the strivings of the spirit.

Under conviction of sin. All of these things have been suggested because it seems to some, at least, that these words should not be on the lips of a Christian, let alone an apostle.

[ 8 : 29 ] If we think about these words, bearing in mind the context in which they are contained, it has to set light on what lies behind such an utterance.

There are many Christians who believe that it is only right to speak of a Christian as a Christian and a saint, but not a Christian and a sinner.

Having come to faith in Christ, their relationship with sin is effectively severed and it no longer has a bearing on their life, on how they live their life, or how their life should be described.

I'm sure you've met professing Christians who believe that the Christian should not take any more to do with sin.

Not in the sense of shunning it or not succumbing to it, but in the sense that it should not feature in our thinking at all.

[ 9 : 46 ] It should not be something that should mar our existence in any way. Because if we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, Christ, we are told, has dealt with our sin.

And if we are in him by faith, that means that our sin is no longer a concern to us. But is that really what the Apostle is teaching us here?

We know that the Scripture tells us that we sin collectively, all of us, without exception. We sin daily in thought, in word and in deed.

That is not segregated to the experience of the unbeliever. It is rightly the confession of all.

That without exception, sin is in our experience today. Perhaps at this very moment, our thoughts could be sinful.

[ 10 : 57 ] Our actions even could be sinful. Because we are not guarding ourselves against what these actions are really speaking about.

Whatever argument Paul is making, he is not contradicting the fact that all of us are sinners.

Not just have been sinners, but are sinners. Because he can't do that. It is an impossibility for him to contradict what he himself has spoken of in this very chapter.

It is an impossibility for him to contradict what he knows to be his experience. The theologian John Murray has written a commentary on the epistle to the Romans.

Earlier on in his consideration of this epistle, speaking about the words of chapter 3 and verse 20, where Paul says, by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight.

[ 12 : 18 ] For by the law is the knowledge of sin. And what Murray says is this, this very truth is verified in Paul's own experience.

And the knowledge, as far as he is concerned, is not merely theoretical knowledge, respecting the nature and fact of sin, but the practical experiential conviction that he himself was sinful.

Now he doesn't mean by that was in the past tense, but was in the sense of acknowledging the fact of his sin. And Paul, when he writes this epistle, and at the point at which he is writing here before he moves on to the wonderful doctrine of justification by faith and establishing it fully, he is making this confession.

There's no doubt that this may be a formative experience. And we're content to acknowledge that. That when we came to faith in Jesus Christ, then we discovered, as Paul did, through the law, what sin was.

And how pervasive all pervasive sin is. But it is not just a former experience. It is an ongoing experience of every child of God.

[ 13 : 53 ] To move on slightly. Is there any doubt in your mind how grief-stricken Paul is?

Through the words that he speaks here. O wretched man that I am. These words surely say to us, we would not expect a Christian to say them, let alone an apostle, but he does.

And we cannot separate them from the context in which they are found. They are words expressive of grief. Not just grief, but a deep grief, sensitive to what causes it, and that is sin itself.

And in the context, Paul is dealing with the existence of indwelling sin. What he calls in verse 21, a law. Now in what sense does he understand or record this to be a law?

I think when you do read, and I hope that you do read not just this passage for yourself, but if you have access to commentaries, you will find that it's not a straightforward matter because it's so, the use of the word law, for example, is repetitive, but in different ways.

[ 15 : 34 ] They're used by him in different ways. And that makes our thinking less clear and more cloudy. But I think that the easiest way to understand what Paul is saying here, in what sense does he reckon this to be a law?

I think it is in this sense. Consistently, it finds it within himself the desire to do what God tells him not to do or not to do what God requires him to do.

He can't get away from it. He knows from the word of God his familiarity with it ensures that he has a knowledge of what God requires of him.

He knows the moral law. He knows the ceremonial law as it impacts upon the life of those who were part of the Jewish faith. He knows all of these things.

So he's familiar with what God expects of him. But through the tutelage of the spirit, he understood and came to know that the law was something that was not to be kept simply externally, but something that was deeper than that.

[ 16 : 56 ] So that when the law commanded him not to sin, in the sense in which he uses this illustration here, not to commit, not to commit, it's a word, that he is sound, remember, what that word is, that he is, that he is, that he is, that he is, that he is, that he is, that he should not be seeking for himself, that the law, as far as he understood it, as he understood it before the dispensation or the administration under which he came to be bound, that he taught, that it was not simply a matter of observance from the outside, but that he was equally capable of committing murder as he was of committing adultery, as he was of committing any of the breaches that the Ten Commandments bring before him in a spiritual sense.

and Paul was someone who understood that better than any. And the best, better, the more he understood it, the more he was inclined to wrestle with that understanding and the grief that it brought into his heart.

John Owen, when he's talking about temptation and sin, he uses the example of Paul's experience.

And he deals with the topic of indwelling sin. And this is what Owen says, there is an exceeding efficacy and power in the reminders or in the remainders of indwelling sin, what dwells within us, even when we think that we have that we have overcome it.

It still remains within us. We're not subject to it in the sense that we are committing it habitually, but there is still the evidence of it in our lives.

[ 19 : 32 ] Thus it is in believers, it is a law in them, though it is not to them. Though it is a rule that is a law in the sense that it is a law that is broken in strength, its strength is weakened, its lessened, its power is impaired, yet it is not mortified, it is not dead.

it is still a law, still a law of great force and efficacy. So as far as the Puritan is concerned, this is entirely the concern of the Apostle, that he discovers this, finds this rampant in his life, and he is not just somebody who is saying, well, that's the way it is for a sinner, even a converted sinner, this is the way things are, I believe it, I intellectually grasp the significance of it, and because I do, I can live with it.

That's not the way it is for the Apostle. He's not stating this so as to excuse sin for the grief of one who is vexed by every sin.

I can't remember which one of the Puritans said, not only is the Christian vexed by his own sin, he is vexed by the sins of others. They cause a rent in their heart when they know that sin is in the world in any way, shape, or form because of the offense that causes their God.

And Paul's expression of grief, all wretched man that I am, is the expression of somebody who knows categorically that there is sin in his heart and that it is a grief to him.

[ 21 : 47 ] And it is a grief to God that it exists where it shouldn't exist. I mean, I think that's the thing. we can say, and I think, I can't remember who I was reading was saying this, that it is a modern slant on the theology of the Bible, which is completely out of kilter with what the Bible is saying.

As if it is saying, going right back to the beginning, to the fall of Adam, and saying, well, when Adam fell, man fell in him, which is true.

But because man fell, then there is a reason for sin. And there is a reason for sin in the life of all who sin after the example of Adam, and to all who have the genetic makeup of Adam.

They cannot but sin, it's inevitable. Now, if you reason like that, the consequences of such reasoning is that you impugn the character of God, because God must ultimately be found responsible for the existence of sin in the world, and you can't do that.

God is not responsible. And every sinner who is acquainted with the grace of God knows the offence that sin causes God. So they are not to excuse it however they encounter it, or however they come face to face with it.

[ 23 : 21 ] the response is the response of the apostle. When you think of every way in which you can, and again you go to theologians, and what is sin?

Well, our favourite answer is always from the shorter category, sin is any want of conformity, unto our transgression of the law of God.

It encompasses, it describes to us the nature of sin. But sin is more than that in the sense that there is a coming short of what God requires.

There is, instead of walking a straight line, that you are the lost sheep of the house of Israel, you're wayward, you're out of the road.

There is the attitude towards God's law, God's law is perfect, and yet the attitude of the sinner is a contradiction of the perfection of the law.

[ 24 : 33 ] All of these elements are found in sin and the way that we do sin. And every sinner will discover if they are of a mind to understand what sin is, that that is the way it is.

Principal Donald MacLeod, when he's describing this in one of his theological books, we are, he says, Christians, yet sin rages within us.

Our lives fall short of their potential, our lives are not straight, they are transgressions, anomalies, and there is no bigger mistake than to forget the power and the force of the prevalence or the prevalence of sin in our lives.

And we must, he says, build our whole spiritual strategy on this fact. In other words, what he is saying, if you are not aware of this, if you are not aware of the potential for sin that is in the heart of men and women, Christians of all descriptions, then you will not be prepared for the machinations of the one who would want all men to sin.

when I was preparing this, I was reminded of the words of Dr.

[ 26 : 10 ] MacDonald. I remember hearing these words quoted repeatedly in a home I was in the communion in Carloway.

And these words in Gaelic were quoted by this old Christian lady. She was soon to be in glory. But her mind was on a loop where she couldn't really engage in conversation or speak about anything but she memorised this word of Dr.

MacDonald. And I'll give it to you. I'm going to quote four verses but I'll quote this verse in Gaelic first of all. It's him of Iach is Hyri I he I I'll give you a translation of these words but these are the words of the of the Christian it's an elegy composed by Dr.

MacDonald in three parts and this part was on the brink of the Jordan or the banks of the Jordan and it was translated into English by Dr.

John MacLeod who was principal of the college at the time and it's a very good translation but it's interesting the things that he touches on that remind us of what the apostles understood personally but a heart that's hard and wicked and a wretched carnal frame and remorseless unbelief are still my sorrow and my shame unbelief above all evils presses sorely with its load desolates my very spirit grieves the blessed son of God tis the evil that hath made me fruitless in the vine of grace and before my own beloved it hath marred both form and face it hath made my journey weary and my step each day but slow and my fear is at the year's end that I wither more than grow tis my mind and I express it these are the words recorded in garlic tis my mind and I express it touching living faith where it hath been of heaven begotten and belief pursues it there and each one that hath not felt it as his burden and his woe say he what he may about it all his faith is but in show and the final section here too is a mystery from the highest seen in every child of grace while his passion hath found favour sin hath in his soul a place and though it is with shame he owns it oftentimes it is his fear that instead of growing weaker sin seems stronger year by year do you think that was the experience of the apostle that he was aware of the experience of sin

[ 29 : 55 ] I'm sure it was even though by the power of God's spirit he endeavoured with all his might to quell the assaults of the evil one it was so deeply engraved in his nature as it is in all our nature that we cannot accept with God's help overcome it it would be just defeat us to say you follow the progress of the apostle he describes the experience his experience all Christians experience of understanding that there is how grace works and how sin is still in the life of the person in whom grace reigns that he concludes this chapter with the words

I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord I thank God because you know were it not for that grace that is all powerful that sin which is all pervasive might seem even as the poet was thinking was going to gain the mastery over but he moves on in the next chapter to declare something that gives him all the confidence that he needs there is therefore no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit they are condemned even in a theatre of their own heart their own sensitivity to sin which God has awakened testifies to the exacting nature of sin in its various vile forms and if it was left to themselves they would submit or maybe think that submission was inevitable but

God by his grace ensures that they will triumph because Christ has gained the victory and there there is no more condemnation they are justified by their faith in him may God encourage us to understand you know it is important for us to realize that it is never an excuse to think that sin is excusable because every sinner sins every Christian is a sinner therefore every Christian sins but that's not not a reason for you to tolerate it to feed it to allow yourself to be led astray by sinful inclinations but rather more to be on our guard on the defense of always applying to the one whose grace is greater than our enemy may bless these thoughts to us let us pray oh lord oh god we marvel at the fact that your world tells us so much that we need to know about our own lives here in this world what we are like and what we will yet be like we give thanks for the privilege of knowing the lord Jesus Christ as the one who is the advocate with the father to whom we can go and whose help we can solicit and whose strength we can acquire help us to seek these things forgive our sins in him amen our closing psalm is in gaelic psalm 89 psalm 89 and sing at verse 30 verse 30 where heavenir when cheg on■

Thank you.

Thank you.

[ 36 : 25 ] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.