

Friday Evening - English

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Preacher: Rev David Campbell

[0 : 00] Please turn back in your Bibles to Romans 7, to the second half of the chapter, beginning at verse 14.

I want to preface the reading of Scripture with just a few words. Then we'll read the second half of the chapter and then into the message.

God, in his great mercy, has provided a remedy, a remedy for man in sin, a remedy that has at its heart the Lord Jesus Christ.

And what a remedy. You believe in him and the change will be remarkable. For one thing, your whole standing with God will completely change.

The believer, from being a guilty sinner, comes to be wholly forgiven and to be accounted righteous with God.

[1 : 30] And on the other hand, sin that has you in its grip will no longer have you in its grip.

Because through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the dominion of sin is broken. Faith in Jesus Christ. It makes us new people, with new hearts, in a new relationship with God.

All of that for the believer. But it does not make us perfect. Not immediately.

If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, sin is still at work in your heart and life. It no longer controls, but it is strong.

It is active. And the result is conflict. As we are about to hear in this second half of Romans 7.

[2 : 46] Reading now from verse 14. For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law that it is good.

So now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me that is in my flesh.

For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.

Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.

[4 : 00] For I delight in the law of God in my inner being. But I see in my members another law, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God. Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

The name Alexander White is, I am sure, familiar to many of you here.

Successor to Aris Candlish back in the 1870s. He was minister successively of Free St. George's Edinburgh, then United Free St. George's.

[5 : 18] He had a very interesting arrangement with his bookseller. Any new commentary that came out was to be sent to the manse on a basis of sale or return.

And here is what Alexander White would do when he got a new commentary on Romans. He would open it at the chapter that we have taken for our scripture reading.

And he would read what the writer concerned had to say about verses 14 to 25. What did he think about the man of Romans 7, 14 to 25?

Was Paul speaking in the section of chapter 7 as a Christian? If the writer in question, if the writer in question denied that, Alexander White would close the commentary, wrap it up again, send it back with a little note to the effect, this is not the commentary for me.

Now you understand what his action implies. Not everyone has agreed as to who this man of Romans 7, 14 and following is.

[6 : 48] Is it Paul the unconverted man? Or is it Paul the Christian? Well, the view that I will be preaching to you this evening is that Paul is speaking here of his experience as a Christian.

And I think it's fair to say that within the Reformed constituency, historically, that has been the predominant few. The late James Montgomery Boyce of Philadelphia writes most Reformed commentaries from Augustine forward, including Luther, Calvin, and the Puritans, have taken this particular view.

Paul, he says, is writing of himself as a mature Christian, describing the Christian's continuing conflict with sin, which we all experience.

So what's the evidence? And I raise that question because there are statements in the second half of Romans 7, which taken on their own, would suggest that Paul is writing, in fact, as an unregenerate man, which he certainly is earlier in the first half of the chapter.

Why is it that so many eminent Christians, scholars, preachers, expositors, over the centuries, have been persuaded that in Romans 7, 14 to the end, Paul is writing as a Christian?

[8 : 31] Well, that's what we are going to be thinking about for a little this evening. But there are two things that I want to say before we launch into our exposition. The first is that we are not going to be touching on all the details.

What I would rather to do is to present to you the big picture. Imagine you are standing on the top of a hill and you're looking down and the atmosphere is hazy and you can't pick out all the details.

But the main features stand out. You know at what you are looking. A flat and wide valley, perhaps, that extends a considerable distance to the right and to the left of the big picture.

And that is what I hope we will be able to see this evening. There are details on which we will not be touching but I do trust that having looked at what we are going to look at, you will get a sense of what this passage is about and be persuaded that for all its difficulties, it is the description of Paul as a Christian.

But there is a second thing that I want to see. Though Paul is talking here about himself, what he has given to us is a description of what Christian life is like for Christians in general.

[10 : 18] For believers just like you and me. It is something similar. that he does in the previous section, verses 7 to 13, Paul is telling us there about himself and about a shattering encounter that he had with sin and the law.

An encounter that brought him face to face. One supposes for the very first time with the fact that he really was a sinner. An encounter that just blew to pieces the self-image that he had of a man faultless before the law of God.

It's Paul's story. But it has innumerable parallels. So many have experienced the very same thing. The law of God stirring up sin and God using that to shatter our self-righteousness, bringing us face to face with what we are and what we need, the grace of God in salvation.

Well, so it is with this final section of Romans 7. It is, as Alexander White describes it, a precious fragment of religious autobiography.

[11 : 43] Paul is writing about himself. But what is true of him is also true of Christians today. It's true of you.

It's true of me. And I pray that it will be an encouragement to our hearts to see that. So what's the evidence that Paul is speaking here as a believer?

Well, it falls into four parts. We're going to move through them fairly rapidly and then we will pause to draw out some lessons for ourselves.

First of all, we can appeal to Paul's grammar and it may very well be that that word grammar has very negative overtones for some of you here.

You were not good at grammar at school. Grammar is a very complicated thing and it can be. But the point about Paul's grammar is as simple as can be and all our boys and girls, all our children can understand it very readily.

[13 : 03] it all has to do with a change from the past tense to the present. Paul has been using the past tense.

Look at verses 8 to 11. But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness.

Apart from the law, sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died.

The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.

The past tense. Paul is telling us something here of his personal history. how for the very first time he came face to face with the fact of his own sin.

[14:05] But when we come to verses 14 to 25, the tense changes from the past tense to the present. Verse 15.

I do not understand my own actions, for I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Verse 18.

For I know that nothing good dwells in me that is in my flesh, for I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. Verses 21 and 22.

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand, for I delight in the law of God in my inner being. And the first part of verse 24, wretched man that I am.

You see the change of tense? Verses 7 to 13, he's speaking about the days before he became a Christian and no one disputes that.

[15:15] And as we would expect, he uses the past tense. But now, he's using the present tense.

And we would naturally suppose that he does that because what he's describing in these verses is his present experience.

A conflict with sin that is going on at the very time that he is writing this letter to the Romans. But the reference is to his experience as a Christian.

that is the conclusion that you would naturally draw from Paul's grammar. Secondly, we can appeal to Paul's emotions.

Reference is made in this section to some very opposite emotions or feelings. Delight and disgust.

[16:20] And each is a pointer to the fact that what Paul is describing here is his experience as a Christian. There is to begin with the feeling of delight.

Verse 22, for I delight in the law of God in my inner being. Now, we have just been singing about that delight. It's why Psalm 1 was chosen for the psalm immediately preceding the sermon.

This blessed man who finds God's holy law his joy and great delight.

Here is this man who knows and enjoys the favour, the blessing of the Lord. Why is that? It's because he does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of scoffers.

But his delight is in the law of the Lord and on that law because he delights in it he meditates day and night. And Paul in Romans 7 is saying that man is me.

[17:39] I too delight in God's law gave him the greatest pleasure. And you will notice how he puts it in my inner being.

It is a description says Professor John Murray of Paul's truest and deepest self or in contemporary jargon this is the real Paul delighting in God's law and not just in the reading of that law and the singing of that law and in meditation on that law but in keeping it as well.

And it's where many of you are isn't it? Oh you wish that your delight was deeper than it is but it's a reality isn't it. You love God's word.

It is your delight it's why you're here this evening. You love the word of God. So there's a feeling of delight but there is also a feeling of disgust.

If there is something in which Paul delights equally there is something that Paul hates that he detests that he loathes and that is sin.

[19:10] Look at verse 15. I do not understand my own actions for I do not do what I want but I do the very thing I hate.

And you see how he begins that sentence I do not understand my own actions literally it is the word no and probably we have to understand it in that rich full sense of loving or approving.

I don't like this. This is hateful to me. That's what Paul is saying.

His heart is set on doing what is right and what is well pleasing to God in what is in accordance with the law. That is his delight. Yet instead of doing that he does the very opposite.

He does what is not right, what is displeasing to God and Paul hates it. He grieves and disgusts him.

[20 : 25] His delight is in the law of God. when it comes to sinning. He's doing what his soul hates. All of it is to see that in his emotions the apostle Paul is becoming Christ-like.

For you will recall how it was said of our blessed master that he loved righteousness and hated iniquity. And Paul is becoming like him.

all his pleasure is in righteousness in keeping the law of God and as for sin it is hateful to him.

And isn't that how it is with us? If we are true believers sin has its attraction. there is no question about that.

But how do we feel when we come to confess sin? That's the question. When you come to confess sin are you coming to talk to the Lord about something that you love?

[21 : 48] Something that you are happy is there in your life? You know that it is the polar opposite. When we come to confess sin we come to confess what is shameful to us and abhorrent to us.

What fills us with loathing even the very attractiveness of sin is our shame and we grieve before it before the Lord.

on account of it Paul's emotions his delight and his disgust and you see in them the mirror of what we excel ourselves experience as true believers.

believers. So we can appeal to his grammar we can appeal to his emotions. Thirdly we can appeal to Paul's mind and I'm thinking now about something that he says in the middle of verse 25.

So then I myself serve the law of God with my mind. heart and I want to appreciate what the apostle is saying to us here we need to make a little excursion into Romans 8 and notice what is said about the mind there.

[23 : 27] And I'm thinking particularly about what he says in verse 7 of Romans 8 where he speaks about the mind that is set on the flesh and how that mind is hostile to God.

How it does not submit to God's law indeed cannot. It is a description of the unconverted man. The man who has never been renewed by the power of the Holy Spirit whose mind or heart is hostile to God's law.

It's what Paul himself was like in the days when he had the experience described for us in verses 7 to 13 when the 10th commandment came home to him and its authority was so resented, stirred up the latent enmity of his heart.

But that's not how it is now. As he writes verse 25, now he says, with my mind, that is with what is deepest in my personality, I serve the law of God.

You see the contrast. His relationship to the law has changed and it has changed because he himself has changed. It's now a law in which he delights, which it is his desire to keep.

[25 : 06] He is its willing servant, if you like, eager to do what it says, eager to do what Christ, his master, says to him through that law.

Again, it's one of the marks of a true Christian, isn't it? It's what is deepest in our personality. we serve the law of God, not grudgingly.

It's where our hearts are. We want to do God's will, which brings us to the fourth and final piece of evidence to which we can appeal as we endeavor to establish that Paul is writing this.

As a Christian, we have appealed to his grammar. And to his emotions. And to his mind. And now, in the fourth place, we appeal to Paul's will.

Verses 15 and 16. I do not understand my own actions, for I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.

[26 : 19] Now, if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law that it is good. Let's ask the apostle a simple question.

What is your heart's desire? What is it that you want to do? In terms of your will, Paul, what is most basic?

Well, here's his answer. And in the light of all that we've seen this evening, it's precisely the answer that you would expect him to give, and that is to do the will of God, to keep the Lord's commandments more than anything else.

That is what Paul wants to do. That's why it is such a grief to him when he finds himself unable to do that.

To sin is to act contrary to what is his deepest wish. The whole bent of Paul's will is not to sin but to do the will of God.

[27 : 38] Do you remember what the Lord Jesus said? How he could say, I do always those things that please the Father?

The man of Romans 7. He would love, he would love to be able to say the same thing. To what do we trace it? How do we explain this change in will? There's only one explanation that will do justice to the facts.

And that is the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. Or to put it in terms of Romans 6, it is because this man in union with Christ has died to sin and risen again to newness of life and is walking in newness of life.

And it's why it's true of you. If you are a true believer, what is most basic? What is the thing that you desire most?

[28 : 43] Isn't it to do what is pleasing to your Father in heaven? there is only one explanation for that and that is the renewing, the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit.

There is only one way in which the believer can account for that through union with my Savior who died and rose to life again, who by virtue of the fact that his life flows into mine has enabled me to die to sin and to walk now in newness of life.

The big picture, there are details that we haven't touched on and I'm very aware of that but here's what we have seen.

We have appealed to Paul's grammar and to Paul's emotions and to Paul's mind and to Paul's will. And when you put those things together, you see how strong, how compelling I trust.

The evidence is that Paul writes this as a Christian. This is not the language of a man who is under the dominion of sin, but rather of a man who has been delivered from that dominion but whose heart is still a scene of conflict.

[30 : 27] So Paul's writing as a Christian. He's writing as a mature Christian. He's writing as an eminent Christian. And here is what his honesty does.

It enables us to draw the following conclusions about the Christian life. Some of you here perhaps are not yet believers.

You've been thinking about it, wrestling with it. what can you expect if by grace you become a believer this evening?

Into what kind of life will you be entering if by grace you become a true Christian?

What have you found as a believer over the years of your Christian experience? Well, it's all here.

[31 : 39] In Romans 7, the following five characteristics of the Christian life, of normal Christianity.

Number one, imperfection. We go back to our introduction to the scripture reading, the second scripture reading, this remarkable change that there has been in our lives of Jesus Christ really as our saviour.

Our standing with God has changed, how we ourselves have changed, how in the language of Romans 6 we have died to sin and are now alive to God.

In union with Christ, we have passed from one realm to another, one in which sin holds sway, to one in which we live under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Great change. Or we could use the language, the difficult language of Romans 7 verse 4 where Paul speaks about having died to the law.

[32 : 54] His whole relationship to God's law has changed. What does he mean? Well, he means that in the days before he became a Christian, the law of God stood, as it were, outside of him, directing him, condemning him, stirring up his sin, deepening his bondage through no fault of its own.

That was the whole of his relationship to God's law. But now through union with Christ in whom he has died to sin and risen again to newness of life, there has been a change in relationship to the law.

And now it is the will of one whom he loves. Now it is his delight. Now he is able, verse 4, to live a fruitful life of obedience to his heavenly master.

So, change, change in Paul, change in you, if the Lord truly is your saviour. But you have not yet been made perfect.

Sin is still alive in your heart and life, and continues to be a threat. that's what we see in Romans 6.

[34 : 24] That's why Paul says, Romans 6, verses 12 and 13, let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies to make you obey their passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.

Paul could not have written that if sin were dead and gone. What has ended is not sin's existence, but sin's domination, sin itself, still alive and active.

And so we have this first characteristic of the Christian life, what we see in Paul, what we see in ourselves, what you will experience if you become a believer yourself, radical as the change is. It has not made you perfect. That's the message of Romans 6, and it's the message of Romans 7. We are not what we once were, but we are not yet perfect.

And that is why we so often are where the apostle Paul is, wanting to do good, but unable to do it, doing instead what our souls hate.

[36 : 11] so you are not to suppose that because you find this imperfection in you, that therefore you have not attained that level of Christianity that you ought to obtain.

Indeed, you have become a Christian at all. No, imperfection is the abiding characteristic of the best of Christians.

And then there's a second characteristic that we are able to trace, and that is conflict. Conflict. Because the sin that remains in us is not powerless or asleep. It no longer holds sway, as it once did, but it is still powerful, it is still active.

It has been dethroned, but in no Christian does it ever give up the effort to regain its ancient authority.

[37 : 14] Hence, the conflict, the conflict that is in every Christian. Verses 21 to 23, so I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.

For I delight in the law of God and my inner being, but I see in my members another law, waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. It's a picture of the Christian's heart, a scene of battle between what we are as renewed men and women and the sin that remains within us.

God. The apostle Paul addresses the same thing in his letter to the Galatians where he speaks about the desire of the flesh being against the spirit and the desire of the spirit being against the flesh.

Perpetual war. Isn't that what you find in your heart, in your inner being? It is your desire to do the will of God, to give to him the love of your heart, to do all those things that please him, but there is that opposite principle that is so powerfully at work and which is utterly opposed to those holy wishes and which is ever seeking to gain the mastery over you.

[38 : 52] And you find yourself just like the apostle Paul, you want to go one way, and sin pulling you in the opposite direction.

Conflict. Normal Christianity. A normal that ceases until the Lord calls us home and in that moment makes us perfect.

So Paul is opening a window, as it were, on the Christian life and we are thankful to him for this fragment of religious autobiography. And as we look through the window that he has opened, what do we see about the Christian life of even the most eminent Christian?

It is characterized by imperfection, it is characterized by conflict, and thirdly, and we're going down and down, sorrow. sorrow. Sorrow.

It's a consequence of these two things that we've been thinking about, imperfection and conflict. Because we are not always victorious, are we?

[40 : 12] We don't always resist temptation. we don't always stand firm and refuse to give in. Our experience is exactly like the apostles.

There are times when we do what our souls hate, the very thing that in our deepest hearts we wish we didn't do.

Now the picture is by no means completely dark. because Christ has been at work. And our delight is in God's law, and with all that is deepest in us, we serve that law.

And our lives are fundamentally characterized by obedience. Indeed, if they are not fundamentally characterized by obedience, we have good reason to question whether they are truly Christian lives at all.

sin is active as well. And we're not able to live the kind of life that we would love to live. We're not able not to sin, and it is our grief that that is so.

[41 : 28] You hear it in that cry in verse 24, O wretched man, that I am sorrow. It's not the whole experience.

But there's no escaping it, is there? You want to please the one who has loved you and given himself for you, and when you don't, it breaks your heart.

So through the window, opened onto Christian experience, normal Christianity, imperfection, conflict, sorrow.

But we've bottomed out, and now it's time to come back up into the light, for there's a fourth characteristic that we can discern, and that is hope. Wretched man that I am, he says, who will deliver me from this body of death, thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

death. It's a wonderful picture, Paul is thinking about the body, and how relentlessly busy sin is wanting us to put our bodies, with all their members, at its disposal, as we used to do.

[42 : 49] It doesn't give up, wages, relentless, war against us, and many, a battle it wins. But when Paul cries out, who will deliver me?

He knows the answer, thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. When death has done its work, and the body is in the ground, we will be free from this conflict, more especially when our Lord Jesus Christ returns in power and in glory, and the change that has begun in us is perfected and made permanent.

the conflict, the sorrow, the defeat, destined to end. Our hope in Christ, a hope of final deliverance, and our hope, a sure hope.

And it is something with which we are to encourage our own hearts and the hearts of others, this painful conflict with sin. It is only for a time you come to Christ as Christ invites you to do.

Yes, you are entering a war zone, but there is one through which you will pass and emerge into final and perfect victory.

[44 : 12] Which brings us to the fifth thing characteristic of the Christian life, the fifth thing that follows, and what Paul has told us, and that is thankfulness.

Verse 25, thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Thanks be to God. Think about it. God pitying us in our plight, men and women in sin. and providing a remedy for us in his son.

And what a remedy. For through Jesus we have a righteousness that covers all our guilt. And through Jesus we have deliverance from the dominion of sin.

And through Jesus we have power to wage daily war. And now through Jesus, the anticipation and then the realization of final deliverance.

[45 : 25] We come on Sunday morning to remember a great Savior who has done great things for us already and who will yet do greater things as he takes us out of the scene of conflict altogether and into the perfection and the never-ending peace of the eternal world.

Brothers and sisters amid the imperfection and the conflict sorrow, take hope and give thanks. Let's pray together.