

“New Year, Same Old Problem”

Romans 7.14-25

NEW YEAR’S RESOLUTIONS > goals for change/improvement in year ahead

SOME RELIGIOUS RESOLUTIONS > greater devotion, church attendance,
Moral Reform > stop swearing, drinking, dancing (Bapt), chewing gum (Singap)

GREAT GOALS > rarely attained / BROKEN by time TAKE DOWN Xmas Tree

“Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil.”

Jeremiah 13.23

BACK TO ROMANS –

Chs. 1 – 3 > MAN NOT RIGHT WITH GOD – Gentiles, Jews, All Mankind

3.19 “every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God”

3.21-26 > Greatest Paragraph in Romans > perhaps the entire Bible

GOD DOES FOR MAN WHAT HE COULD NEVER DO FOR HIMSELF

“But now a righteousness from God...has been made known...This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe...(we) are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”

Ch. 4 > JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH – Illustrated > Lives of Abraham & David

Ch. 5 > FRUIT OF JUSTIFICATION > Marvelous Benefits

v. 1 “since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.”

DOES NOT GET MUCH BETTER THAN THAT > God’s Christmas Present!

Ch. 8 > Greatest Chapter in Bible > v. 17 “We are...heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ...I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”

FULL PICTURE OF SALVATION

Ch. 3 > God has saved us from the PENALTY of Sin > Work in the PAST

Ch. 8 > God will save us from the PRESENCE of Sin > Work in the FUTURE

Ch’s 6 & 7 PRESENT > God is saving us from the POWER of Sin

Romans 6 > Freedom from Sin / Ch. 7 > Freedom from Law

Romans 6 > How can I stop doing bad things?

Romans 7 > How can I begin doing good things?

1. Who is this guy? 2. What is his message? 3. What can we learn from him?

1. Who is this guy?

CONTROVERSY over INTERP. – true of many texts Usually Leave in STUDY
IMPORTANCE OF ISSUE – not theological obscurity / # of Angels on Pin Head
HOW TO OBEY GOD, Role of the Law, Means of Sanctification and Growth

DEBATE > Identity of the “I”

Began in vs. 7 “I would not have known what sin was” / PAST TENSE

Now from vs. 14 > “I” in PRESENT TENSE > “I am unspiritual”

WHO is THIS I? > Historic Answers

1. Unbeliever – Paul before his conversion to Christ – Greek Church Fathers
2. Almost believer – Paul midway btwn faithlessness and faith – Lloyd-Jones, Stott
3. Mature believer – Paul the Apostle – Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Packer, Boice

THEOLOGICAL LECTURE > Expand and Explain all Pros and Cons

SERMON > Conclusion of My Studies and GIVE BIBLICAL SUPPORT

Conclusion: Paul the Apostle– Mature Believer > most obvious meaning of “I am”

3 REASONS WHY MIGHT NOT THINK “I” Guy refers to Mature Believer

1) v. 14 “I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.”

Unbeliever? 6.18 “You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to
righteousness”

KEY – 6.16 “when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him”

2) v. 18 “I cannot carry it out.” > the Good he WANTS TO DO

WE WOULD THINK THAT > True Believer has POWER to Do God’s Will

PAUL AS NON-CHRISTIAN – Filled with Cocky Self-Assurance

Philippians 3 > “If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh,
I have more...as for legalistic righteousness, (I was) faultless.”

3) v. 23 “a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members”

v. 24 “What a wretched man I am!” > Denial of Victorious Life in Christ

MORE EVIDENCE OF TRUE BELIEVER > Converted Disciple

1) v. 22 “For in my inner being I delight in God's law”

Because of what Paul has already said – 3.10,11 > "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.”

Also because of what Paul will say – 8.7 “The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.”

2) v. 25 “I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law”

SUBJECTION of HEART and WILL is IMPOSSIBLE for UNREGENERATE
8.5 “Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires // 8.8 “Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.”

3) WILL IS TOWARD THE GOOD

v. 15 “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do”

v. 18 “I have the desire to do what is good”

v. 19 “For what I do is not the good I want to do”

v. 21 “I want to do good”

4) EVIL is in VIOLATION of that which he LOVES

v. 16 “I do what I do not want to do”

v. 19 “For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on doing.”

v. 20 “I do what I do not want to do”

PREVAILING WILL / PROPENSITY / DIRECTION of CHARACTER > GOOD

Luke 18.19 Jesus said "No one is good--except God alone.

UNSAVED man HATES the Good / BELIEVER loves and seeks the GOOD

JAMES BOICE “If we are Christians we will never get anywhere by assuming that the 7th chapter of Romans is written about someone other than ourselves. Paul is writing about himself as a mature Christian and therefore about all who are true believers.” / THUS > This Guy is YOU and ME if we know the Lord Jesus Christ

2. What is his message?

SAME BASIC MESSAGE > 3 X's > v. 14-17 / v. 18-20 / v. 21-24

Each BEGINS WITH A STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

v. 14 "I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin"

v. 18 "I know that nothing good lives in me"

v. 21 "When I want to do good, evil is right there with me"

DESCRIPTION OF THE CONFLICT

v. 15 "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do."

18 For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on doing"

v. 22 "For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members."

WHY THIS PROBLEM EXISTS > v. 17 "it is sin living in me."

v. 20 "it is sin living in me that does it." v. 24 "this body of death"

TESTIMONY OF MATURE CHRISTIAN / SEASONED APOSTLE

a. The Law Cannot Change You v. 14 "the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual"

LAW = holy, just, good, spiritual > REFLECTION of a HOLY GOD

LAW is GOOD and HOLY > but has no Power to MAKE US GOOD and HOLY

"Our OLD NATURE KNOWS No Law, NEW NATURE NEEDS No Law"

LAW ACTIVATES Old Nature > Law Cannot ERRADICATE Old Nature

We are IN CHRIST a WORK IN PROGRESS

Delivered from Penalty of Sin / ANTICIPATING deliverance PRESENCE of Sin
 JAMES DUNN emphasized the 'eschatological tension of being caught between the two epochs of Adam and Christ.'...suspended between the death and resurrection of Christ. This is the 'two sidedness of the believer's experience' being simultaneously in Adam and in Christ, enslaved and liberated."

JOHN CALVIN “This is the Christian warfare between flesh and Spirit, of which Paul speaks in Galatians 5”

b. The Law Cannot Enable You to Do Good

- 1) We CANNOT DO Good we WANT to do
- 2) We DO the EVIL we DO NOT WANT to do

Luke 17.10 EVEN AFTER OUR BEST “we are unprofitable servants”

LEGALIST > “Obey the Law and you will do good, and live a good life”
WILL NOT WORK BECAUSE LAW ONLY > Reveals and Arouses Sin

LAW is Good / But by NATURE I am BAD > LEGALIST IS WRONG

c. The Law Cannot Set You Free

v. 24 Who will rescue me from this body of death? / CANNOT DO IT HIMSELF

EFFORTS AT “SELF REFORM” END IN FRUSTRATION > cannot change self
1 Cor 15.56 “the strength of sin is the Law”

BIBLE SPEAKS NEGATIVELY ABOUT OUR OLD NATURE

JESUS: “the flesh counts for nothing” John 6.63

PAUL: “put no confidence in the flesh” Phil 3.3

FLESH will not SERVE THE LAW – because FLESH is AT WAR with God

3. What can we learn from him?

a. Candid about his Situation

NOT TRANSPARENCY we expect from man in STAINED GLASS Window

CONFESSION more like Guest on TV Show / or Patient on Analyst’s Couch
NOT EXPECTED WORDS of Holy Apostle written in Sacred Scripture

SHOULD NOT SURPRISE – Paul never EXCLUDED Himself from BLEAK
DESCRIPTIONS of the Sinful Human Condition

HONEST> We ALL have Skeletons in the Closet / SINFUL NATURE & HABITS

TENSION > btwn what we are and what God is making us in Christ NORMAL

JESUS “took (a) blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?" He looked up and said, *"I see people; they look like trees walking around."* Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. Mark 8.23-25

We're WAITING for that SECOND TOUCH > that Blessed Hope of His Coming
MEANWHILE “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror” 1 Cor 13.12

“A man in the crowd answered, "Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech...Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?" "From childhood," he answered. "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." "If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes." Immediately the boy's father exclaimed,

"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" Mark 9.24

WHY IS THAT GUY IN THE BIBLE? Because he is so much like me and you!

“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”
1 John 3.2

b. Confesses his Sin ONE WAY Paul Sounds DIFFERENT from TV Talk Show

Does NOT Play our FAVORITE GAME > “the Blame Game”
OLD GAME > BEGAN with Grandpa & Grandma in the GARDEN OF EDEN

Adam The woman you put here with me-she gave me some fruit from the tree 3.12

GRANDMA EVE played WELL TOO "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." 3.13

J.I. PACKER “We are assiduous blamers of others for whatever goes wrong in our marriages, families, churches, careers, and so on...Romantic complacency and resourcefulness in acting the injured innocent are among the most Spirit-quenching traits imaginable, since both become excuses for doing nothing”

v. 25 “I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.”

JOHN MURRAY “The most significant aspect of this concluding description is the way in which the apostle emphatically identifies himself as the agent in both cases. ‘I myself in my mind...and in the sinful nature’...The apostle did not disavow his own personal responsibility...in the clearest terms he brings an indictment against himself...he (is not) the involuntary and helpless victim of some alien power wholly extrinsic to his responsible and voluntary agency (so that) he would be relieved of all moral responsibility”

c. Confident in his Savior v. 24 “Who will rescue me from this body of death?”

I THINK I CAN KEEP my NEW YEAR’S RESOLUTIONS / I will reform Myself
I will stop Drinking, Smoking, Swearing, Dancing, AND Chewing Gum

PETER confident in self "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death."
Luke 22.33

EVEN IF YOU MANAGED > What about your PAST SINS?

GOD is HOLY> One sin is INTOLLERABLE/ Makes you inadmissible to Heaven

SHOCKING CANDOR of Paul > Even Apostle of God dwells in Body of DEATH
Even GREAT PETER DENIED JESUS THREE TIMES

OUR ONLY HOPE - v. 25 “Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

CONFIDENT SHOUT SETS TONE FOR WHOLE CHAPTER
NOT JUST MORBID NAVEL GAZING > honest, humble self evaluation
IN the LIGHT of the FINISHED WORK OF CHRIST FOR OUR SALVATION

SIMILAR STRUGGLE > Physical Sufferings & Dangers > 2 Corinthians 1 (8-10)
“We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us”

GOD OF ADVENT PROMISE IS GOD OF RESURRECTION HOPE

“The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Corinth 15.56,57

PROVES DIVINE ORIGIN OF THE GOSPEL –

MAN’S GOSPEL > Islam, Legalism, Christian Cults > “I can do it!”
OPPOSITE EXTREME > Since God does Everything > WE DO NOTHING

GOD’S GOSPEL > Because God does Everything / We also must give OUR ALL

“Continue to *work out your salvation* with fear and trembling, for it is *God who works in you* to will and to act according to his good purpose.” Phil 2.12,13

JAMES BOICE “A gospel in which we must do everything possible to attain a victory over sin – but in which, in spite of all we do or can ever do, the victory when it comes is by God alone and not by us or for our glory – a gospel like that must be from God”

d. Committed to the Struggle > Paul is clearly NOT AN AMERICAN

STRUGGLE in Romans 7 – Tension between Old and New Natures in Believer
What God has made us in Christ / and What we still are in our unperfected state

AMERICANS AVOID STRUGGLES AT ALL COSTS > we can buy/have it all

1. We have a FORMULA for Everything

FOUR SPIRITUAL Laws / Church Growth Principles/ 12 Step RECOVERY Plans

FORMULA > STOP doing Easy Things > Chewing Gum or Going to Movie
START doing More Difficult Things > attend SEMINAR or COURSE

FORMULA SLOGANS “Get out of Romans 7 and get into Romans 8”

“Get Self off the Throne of your Life and let Christ take Control”

“Let Go and Let God”

Underlying MOTIVE Formulas > LAZY OPTIMISM / life is meant to be EASY

2. We look for a NEW EXPERIENCE

Perhaps Charismatic Experience > Speaking in Tongues / a “Second Blessing”

Find a New Church / More Excitement / Better Worship / Better Preaching
ALL GOOD THINGS TO HELP IN THE STRUGGLE > not AVOID IT

3. AVOIDANCE > get our Mind OFF THE BATTLE

Pop in a Movie / Go Shopping / Eat Something / Surf the Internet / Hit the Gym
OR MORE ADDICTIVE AVOIDANCES – drugs, sex, alcohol

GOOD Things used in Wrong Ways for Wrong Reasons > become BAD THINGS

Paul > very UnAmerican > REALISTIC EMBRACE OF THE STRUGGLE

v. 25. Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

LAST SENTENCE ECHOES THE STRUGGLE > even after Victory is Declared
Realistic Description of this Life > Waiting to FULLY EXPERIENCE Victory
Rom 7 Full of LAW – mentioned 31 X's / Rom 8 Full of SPIRIT – 21 X's
BY THE SPIRIT WE WALK IN OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S LAW

REST OF PAUL'S TEACHING CONTINUES TO EXPLAIN STRUGGLE
Romans 13.14 Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

“Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood”
Ephesians 6.10-12

“I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me...Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” Phil 3.12

FLOW of Romans 5 to 8 > from Justification to Glorification

STRUGGLE IN FAITH > never hear from Copeland, Hagan, Hinn

NOT A POSTER BOY FOR PROSPERITY THEOLOGY

18th C English poet William Cowper, born in 1731 and died 1800

overview by John Piper

man struggled with depression and despair almost all his life

His father was rector but not evangelical, and Wm grew up without any saving relation to Christ.

His mother died when he was six and his father sent him to boarding school

1749 he was apprenticed to a solicitor / lawyer

In 1752 he sank into his first paralyzing depression -- the first of four major battles with mental breakdown so severe as to set him to be suspended out of windows for weeks at a time. Struggle with despair came to be the theme of his life.

William Cowper's life seems to be one long accumulation of pain.

In 1759 when he was 28 years old he was appointed Commissioner of Bankrupts in London. What would have been a great career advancement to most men struck fear in William Cowper -- so much so that he had a total mental breakdown, tried three different ways to commit suicide and was put into an asylum. "

At that point suddenly recalled a "treatise on self-murder" that he read when he was 11 years old.

I well recollect when I was about eleven years of age, my father desired me to read a vindication of self-murder, and give him my sentiments upon the question: I did so, and argued against it. My father heard my reasons, and was silent, neither approving nor disapproving; from whence I inferred that he sided with the author against me

In October 1763 he bought poison. He pondered escaping to France to enter a monastery. He was losing his hold on reality almost entirely.

he set out to drown himself but he found the water too low

When he got home that evening he tried to take the poison but found his fingers "closely contracted" and "entirely useless." The next morning he tried three times to hang himself with a garter. The third time he became unconscious, but the garter broke.

Now everything he read condemned him. Sleep would not come, and, when it did, it brought him terrifying dreams. When he awoke he "reeled and staggered like a drunken man."

So in December 1763, he was committed to St. Albans Insane Asylum

Increasingly he felt he was not utterly doomed. There came another revelation and he turned again to the Bible and the first verse he saw was Romans 3:25: "Whom God hat set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God."

"Immediately I received the strength to believe it, and the full beams of the Sun of Righteousness shone upon me. I saw the sufficiency of the atonement He had made, my pardon sealed in His blood, and all the fullness and completeness of His justification. In a moment I believed, and received the gospel"

John Newton was the pastor at the church in Olney. We know him mainly as the author of Amazing Grace. But we should also know him as one of the healthiest, happiest pastors in the 18th century.

For 13 years Newton is Cowper's pastor and counselor and friend. Cowper said, "A sincerer or more affectionate friend no man ever had"

Newton saw Cowper's bent to melancholy and reclusiveness and drew him into the ministry as much as he could. They would take long walks together between homes and talk of God and his purposes for the church. then in 1769 Newton got the idea of collaborating with Cowper on a book of hymns to be sung by their church. He thought it would be good for Cowper's poetic bent to be engaged.

In the end Newton wrote about 208 hymns and Cowper wrote 68. The hymnal was published in 1779. Besides "Amazing Grace," Newton wrote "How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds" and "Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken" and "Come, My Soul Thy Suit Prepare." Cowper wrote "God Moves in a Mysterious Way" and "There is a Fountain Filled with Blood" and "O for a Closer Walk with God."

But before Cowper could complete his share he had a breakdown

Such breakdowns came virtually every ten years in their worst form.

Again there were repeated attempts at suicide, and each time God providentially prevented him. Newton stood by him all the way through this, even sacrificing at least one vacation so as not to leave Cowper alone.

In 1780 Newton left Olney for a new pastorate

It is a great tribute to him that he did not abandon his friendship with Cowper, though this would have been emotionally easy to do no doubt. Instead there is an earnest exchange of letters for twenty years. Cowper poured out his soul to Newton as to no one else.

In 1786 Cowper entered his fourth deep depression and again tried unsuccessfully to commit suicide.

In the 1790's there were new expressions of hope, From time to time he gave evidence, for example, that he was permitted by God "once more to approach Him in prayer." But there was horrible blackness for him much of the time.

William Cowper died apparently in utter despair in 1800.

We must fortify ourselves against the dark hours of depression by cultivating a deep distrust of the certainties of despair.

may the Lord raise up many John Newton's for us, for the joy of our churches and for the survival for the survival of the William Cowpers among us and in our churches. Newton remained Cowper's pastor and friend the rest of his life, writing and visiting again and again. He did not despair of the despairing.

the lesson is surely that those of us who teach and preach and want to encourage our people to press on in hope and faith must not limit ourselves to success stories. The life of William Cowper has a hope-giving effect

let us rehearse the mercies of Jesus often for our people, and point them again and again to the blood of Jesus. These were the truths that brought Cowper to faith

he said, "I saw the sufficiency of the atonement He had made, my pardon sealed in His blood, and all the fullness and completeness of His justification."

*God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.*

*Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill,
He treasures up his bright designs
And works his sovereign will.*

*Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.*

*Judge not the lord by feeble sense,
But trust him for his grace;
behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.*

*His purpose will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
the bud may have bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.*

*Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan his work in vain:
God is his own interpreter,
And He will make it plain.*