

The Conflict

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[0 : 00] Romans chapter 7 and we shall read again verse 19. Romans 7 verse 19. For the good that I would, I do not, but the evil which I would not, that I do.

The good that I would or that I wish, I do not, but the evil that I wish not, that I do.

Now there are different views on the way to interpret verses 14 to 25, the second half of this chapter.

It has been much disputed right from the earliest days. Basically, there are three different views. There are those who say that what Paul is talking about here is himself in his unconverted state. Others say that what he's talking about is himself at the point of conversion or just before he was converted. And then others that Paul is talking about himself as a Christian.

[1 : 24] Let's look briefly at these views by way of introduction. First, there are those and many of them right up to this present day who say that Paul here is talking about himself before he became a Christian.

How else could he say in verse 14, I am carnal? Surely somebody who is carnal isn't a Christian. How could he say, I am sold under sin?

If he was a Christian. And he says, the good that I would, I do not, but the evil that I would not, that I do. And he calls himself a wretched man.

Oh, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? Surely Paul is talking about himself before he became a Christian.

But then we notice that he is talking here about a conflict. He's talking about a battle going on inside him.

[2 : 36] He says, the good that I would, I do not. The evil that I would not, that I do. I find a law that when I would do good, evil is present with me.

I see a 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.

There's a conflict going on in the Apostle Paul. Now Paul tells us about himself. Earlier in this chapter, he says, verse 9, I was alive without the law once.

There was a time when I was alive without the law. When the law didn't bother me. Not that he was a lawless person.

He tells us in Philippians chapter 3, that according to the righteousness which was in the law, I was blameless. He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees, careful to keep the law.

[3 : 40] But it was only on the outside. And so, you have this man, good living man, respectable man, highly thought of. But he says, I was alive without the law once.

There was a time when he felt quite happy with his life. And he felt that, according to the law of God, he was blameless. And then something happened.

The law came and I died. The commandment came, verse 9, Sin revived and I died. So surely, what he is talking about in the second half of this chapter is not an unconverted state.

But then some people say, what Paul is talking about here is himself at the time when he was converted. Or just, rather, just prior to his conversion.

And certainly that's what he's talking about in verses 9 to 13. He says, I was alive without the law once. But then something happened. The commandment came. Something happened in my conscience.

[4 : 51] The law of God came alive and I felt guilty and condemned, convicted of my sins. I became aware that I was a sinner in the presence of God.

And I lost my hope. And I lost my assurance. And I lost my self-righteousness. I died. Sin revived in me and sin was awake in me and I realized I was a sinner and a guilty sinner.

And so the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. When the commandment came alive, I saw that I couldn't keep it and therefore it condemned me to die. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me and by it slew me. He's talking there, yes, about conviction of sin.

Sin took occasion by the commandment. But in the latter part of this chapter, he changes the tense. [6 : 03] In verse 9, he's saying, I was alive without the law once and the commandment, which was ordained unto life, I found to be unto death.

The past tense, sin taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me and slew me. But when we come to verse 14, he's using the present tense.

He says, I am carnal, I am carnal, sold under sin. And he says, that which I do, I allow not. For what I would, that do I not, but what I hate, that do I. So in verses 9 to 13, he's using the past tense, he's describing a past experience, whereas in verses 14 to 25, he's talking in the present tense.

More than that. He says, in verse 22, I delight in the law of God after the inward man.

[7 : 14] Now nobody who is unconverted delights in the law of God, and particularly not somebody who is under conviction of sin, who is aware of their guilt.

Such a person is full of fear, fear of God's wrath, fear because of guilt and because of hell. And such a person would love that there was no law.

But he says here, I delight in the law of God after the inward man. Deep down inside me, I relish, I enjoy God's law.

No, he's not talking about his pre-conversion state. What he's talking about in verses 14 to 25 is the Christian experience.

And those who are true Christians know what it is to go through the conflict that Paul is talking about here. It's that constant experience of a Christian as long as we are in this life.

[8 : 27] Let's look then, first of all, at this conflict. What is the conflict? So often, the Bible describes the Christian as involved in warfare.

It says to us, fight the good fight. Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God wherewith you shall be able to overcome.

What is the fight that he's talking about? Some people say there's two natures fighting. The old nature and the new nature.

But the only person with two natures is Jesus. He's got a divine nature and a human nature. So strictly speaking, you and I have only one nature.

A human nature. Then some people talk as if the conflict were two people, two men fighting, the old man and the new man.

[9 : 36] But we're only one person. One man. And as he says in chapter 6, verse 6, the old man is crucified.

The old man was put to death. The old us. Old things have passed away. Behold, all things are made new.

That is what conversion is. It's the crucifixion of the old man and the emerging of a new man. So what then is the battle?

It's described for us here as a battle between two laws. Two laws which command and demand. He says, I delight in the law of God after the inward man. So there's the law of God. The commandments. All the commandments of scripture.

[10 : 42] scripture. And Paul says, in my deepest, innermost self, I love the law of God. I delight in it.

So there's the law of God and I'm on the side of the law of God. But then he says, I see another law in my members. Warring against the law of my mind, the law of God.

And bringing me into captivity captivity to this law of sin which is in my members. So there's the law of sin in my members.

The law of God and the law of sin. And there's a battle between these two. You could call it two principles. The good and the evil.

And the two are fighting against one another. Yes, you and I are new men and new women in Christ Jesus and through our conversion we are a new creation.

[11 : 45] But the new man still has the old roots of sin within. Just like a garden that is turned over.

Initially everything looks so clean but it takes just a day or two for the weeds to start poking up their heads again.

It's a wonderful thing to be converted and it's a tremendous sense of joy and peace when you repent and believe in Jesus.

But it doesn't take long before the old sins poke up their ugly heads once more. We hate ourselves for these sins.

We are ashamed before God and before our fellow men but yet we sin. We delight in the law of God after the inward man.

[12:51] We love the truth. We love God and we want to keep his commandments. If you love me you keep my commandments. Our hearts desire is to be holy. but yet we're not what we want to be.

The good that I would that I would love to do and to be the good that I would I do not but the evil that I would not the evil that I hate that's what I do so often so much.

Paul says verse 14 I am carnal. It's a very strong word.

I am fleshly. It's such a strong word that people say how could you say that Paul here is a Christian when he says I am carnal.

and yet he uses that term to describe Christians in 1 Corinthians 3 in verse 1 when he says I speak unto you not as spiritual but as carnal.

[14:05] You Christians you are carnal fleshly earthly worldly and Paul says when I look into my heart and when I consider my life I am carnal I am so fleshly so earthly so tied to this present world so absorbed with the things of this life so full of the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires and cares and pleasures of this world I am not spiritual the way I would love to be I am not all taken up with God I am not praying without ceasing I am not in everything giving thanks I am not fool of the Holy Ghost the way I would love to be I am carnal earthly and worldly and sensual is that your confession and is it your grief and then he says

I am sold under sin in the Old Testament we read about one man who is described as more wicked than all the kings who went before him Ahab and we are told that he sold himself to do evil sold himself to do wickedness and that's the height of godlessness so is Paul here comparing himself with Ahab no you see there's a vital difference there's a difference in that Ahab sold himself to do evil Paul says I am sold I don't sell myself I wouldn't sell myself no not for all the world would I sell myself to do evil but I find myself as if I were sold

I'm like Joseph whom his brothers took and sold to the Ishmaelites and so he found himself a slave in Egypt not willingly not by choice but rather because as it were of an outside force a power that took possession of him so the apostle says here I am carnal sold under sin I am like a slave I am in bondage I wish I were free he is feeling so powerless so chained you know what it is to feel as if you were in chains you would love to leap up as it were and leap out of all your sins and live a holy godly life but you feel so heavy so pushed down so dragged back by your sins if only

I could be free but you feel you're held down and pulled back sold under sin feeling so powerless for that which I do I allow not I don't I don't take any pleasure in what I'm doing my sins for what I would that do I not but what I hate that do I do you hate sin there's a great mark of the Christian the Christian sins yes we're not perfect no but we hate sin if if if then I do that which I would not I consent unto the law that it is good yes God's law is good there's nothing better than it if only I could keep God's law if only I could live a holy life now then it is no more

I that do it but the sin that dwelleth in me this horrid sin within me for I know that in me that is in my flesh dwelleth no good thing nothing good in me that your confession tonight there's no good thing in me so wretched so filthy so sinful so evil in me in my flesh dwelleth no good thing to will is present with me the desire is there but how to perform that which is good I find not if only I could live a holy life if only I could serve God without ceasing if only I could be a bright and shining witness for the Lord but how to perform it I find not for the good that I would I do not but the evil that I would not that's what I do remember remember how

[19:26] Melancton put it Melancton was one of the reformers who worked alongside Luther and then succeeded him when Melancton was converted he thought he was going to be such a good person he was going to live such a holy life and then on his own confession he said I found that old Adam was too strong for young Melancton old Adam was too strong for young Melancton the old tendency to sin the old lust roots of sin corrupt desires the sin that dwelleth in me that old Adam original sin the corruption of our whole nature which has descended to us from Adam old

Adam was too strong for the young Christian Melanthin and so Melanthin found that time and time again he was doing the very thing he hated this sin that he condemned in his own life so what is the conflict then the law of God and the law of sin the principle that desires to serve God and loves God and wants to please him is fighting with another principle that is still there within us the principle that commands us and demands of us that we do evil and is working away fueled by Satan seeking to bring us into bondage to the law of sin and of death when did this conflict in the second place when did this conflict begin

Paul says verse 9 I was alive without the law once there was a time when sin when I was dead in sin a time when I was quite happy with my life with my achievements with what I had done and with the way that I was living I was dead to the law self righteous and self contented but then something happened what happened I was regenerated I was born again and when I was born again I could no longer be content with the old way and with the old righteousness I was dead in trespasses and sin and then

I was resurrected and being resurrected I couldn't be happy and content I couldn't accept that way of life now there was a battle going on a battle for the soul a battle for my life fighting with this law of sin which was in my members my eyes were opened to see God and holiness and my own sin my ears were opened to hear God calling to me saying turn ye turn ye from your evil ways O house of Israel for why will you die it's something like a man going to dinner a special function in a very posh hotel and on the way there he has to go through a dark lane and there he trips and falls in a puddle you can just imagine him trying to clean himself and the closer he comes to the light of the posh hotel the more he sees the dirt upon him the harder he tries to clean off that dirt and the more he's coming into the light the bright light of the hotel the more he sees his own filthiness you and I have been called to a banquet in heaven our eyes have been opened a little of heaven's light has shone and it shows us the mire that clings to us and the closer we come to heaven the more we see that mire maybe we've got lots of it washed off already but oh how we see it so clearly and even more clearly and we're bothered about the tiny little specks even because we want to be without spot and blameless before him in love and one day we shall be the unconverted man has of course a conscience unconverted people are bothered about sin also and there are some of you and there are certain sins and you wouldn't do them if you did them you'd be really bothered about them isn't that true there are certain things you wouldn't do on the sabbath you wouldn't tell lies and you wouldn't swear lots of things you wouldn't do but are they not outward things you see this is the great difference between the unconverted person and the converted the unconverted is concerned about the outward appearance about outward sins sins of speech and sins of deed things that people will see and things that are obvious but the

Christian the Christian is bothered about the heart about attitudes about feelings about desires yes bothered about the outside too but your conscience has been awakened to the fact that you sin in your thoughts and you're concerned about your thoughts that you don't love God as much as you should that you don't thank him as much as you ought that you don't worship him that you don't pray to him that you don't hate sin in your heart these are the things that bother the Christian love and so there's a real battle going on the law of God and the law of sin and of death and sometimes the law of God is winning and sometimes it seems to us the law of sin and of death is winning

[27 : 21] I remember hearing Professor Macmillan, Douglas Macmillan talking about himself when he was converted he was full of the joy of the Lord at the time he was a shepherd down there in Ardemarchan and this morning full of the joy of the Lord he was out looking after his sheep he was on a motorbike as he was going along on the motorbike he was watching some sheep on the hillside not keeping his eye on where he was going he went into a ditch and had a nasty fall he found a curse coming up into his mouth and it was a terrible shock to him he thought that cursing and swearing was gone forever but he found that there was a sin rising up in his mouth an old sin the sort of thing he would have done in his unconverted day it didn't come out but it rose up in his throat and that was enough to fill him with sorrow and with sadness and with grief we have to realise that as Christians we're not perfect there's a battle going on a constant warfare between good and evil but then in the third place there's comfort for us here

Alexander White who is quite a gifted writer some of the things he writes are a little bit suspect but he writes many good things also one time he was talking about this very passage and he said that he had in his congregation an old lady 90 years of age who told him that thousands of times she had been saved from despair by reading this chapter you know what he meant the presence of this

chapter is so encouraging for the Christian the Christian who is fighting and battling and struggling with sin the Christian who feels there's so much wrong in my life and the Christian who feels my spots are not the spots of his children

I'm not like the rest of the Lord's people they're such good people I'm such a sinner and then you come and you read a passage like this and what a comfort it is what an encouragement it saves us from despair when we realise that even the great and holy apostle Paul Paul who could say for me to live is Christ to die is gain Paul says I am carnal sold under sin the good that I would I do not but the evil that I would not that I do this very conflict that is within us proves that we are regenerate we're not dead in trespasses and sins we're not in that state of which the apostle said I was alive without the law once feeling that I could cope quite happily with the law of God it didn't bother me now we can say

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 I'm a captive I'm not free the way I would love to be oh wretched man that I am do you ever cry out in that way oh wretched man oh wretched woman that I am who shall deliver me from the body of this death brought into captivity against our will with the mind I serve the law of God but with the flesh the law of sin but friends the fact that we serve the law of God with our mind shows that the Holy Spirit is within us the fact that we are battling with sin the fact that we delight in the law of God proves to us that the Holy Spirit is there it should be an encouragement to us a comfort it's a mark of grace it's one of the distinguishing features of God's children do you know this conflict in your own heart do you know what it is to wrestle with indwelling corruption and finally the victory is sure the flesh wars against the spirit says Paul in Galatians 5 and the spirit against the flesh and these two are contrary the one to another so that you cannot do the good that you would the spirit is warring against the roots of sin and there's a horrid battle going on yes many battles and some of them are lost and sometimes having lost the battle we cry out

I am carnal sold under sin oh wretched man that I am we feel such a failure no good thing dwelleth in me how to perform that which is good I find not we feel so helpless evil is so easy oh wretched man that I am who shall deliver me but then Paul tells us the answer I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord God will deliver me through Jesus Christ I shall be delivered where he begins the good work he will bring it on until the day of Christ Jesus I have faith in Christ that my sins will be forgiven I have faith in Christ that I will be delivered from sin I have faith in Christ that one day [34 : 54] I shall be like him without spot and blameless victory is sure for the Christian so often we are knocked down but yet we can say with Micah rejoice not against me oh mine enemy though I fall I shall arise again though I sit in darkness the Lord shall be a light unto me rejoice not against me oh mine enemy how the devil loves to laugh at us to mock us to ridicule us when we sin to fill us with despair if he could but we can turn to him and say rejoice not against me oh mine enemy though I fall I shall arise again though I sit in darkness the Lord won't leave me there the Lord shall be a light unto me victory is sure we are more than conquerors through him who loved us

God causeth us always to triumph in Christ Jesus at the end of the day the flesh will be conquered the body of death will be destroyed and you and I will be perfectly holy in the full enjoying of God to all eternity rejoice although you feel so weak and you feel such a failure it's a great encouragement in any battle to know that at the end of the day you'll win just think of any conflict you have or anything you're attempting to do if you feel that you're going to fail it's very hard to keep going but if you feel you're going to win what strength it gives and you will win none of

God's people will fail all who put their trust in Jesus with the aid of the Holy Spirit they shall prevail nothing shall separate us from the love of Christ neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor powers nor things present nor things to come nor height nor depth nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord does this then describe you this conflict this warfare this battle the good that I would I do not the evil that I would not that I do if it does then your place is amongst the Lord's people professing his name at his table obeying the command that he left with us do this in remembrance of me showing forth his death till he come your place is at the means of grace that he has given us which is so helpful to us in this warfare the devil tries to discourage and dishearten you and keep you back and keep you from enjoying the good things of the kingdom of God don't let him yes you're a sinner yes you have failed so often but remember you will one day succeed remember you're in good company the apostle

Paul great apostle though he was he knew the conflict he knew the fight he didn't say I'm perfect but he said I'm carnal sold under sin oh wretched man that I am he was longing for deliverance and if you're longing for deliverance your place is amongst the Lord's people and one day you will sit with his people in the banquet in heaven and if you are to sit with God's people in heaven then your duty is to sit with them on earth but no doubt there are some of you here and you don't know this warfare in your soul you don't know what it is for this fight to be going on you feel quite content with your life maybe there are little things that could be improved but you feel quite happy with your achievements up till now ah friend if only the

Lord would open your eyes to see the rottenness of your heart that all your righteousness is a smelly rack that your heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked if only God would show you something of your guilt and filth and shame so that you would cry out to him realize in the awfulness of a lost eternity tormented for these sins forever the Lord is saying to you tonight come unto me seek me him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out those that seek me shall find me look unto me and be saved look unto me and I will give you light and I will give you my spirit and I will give you hope for eternity let us pray gracious and ever blessed

[41 : 12] God we pray that thou wouldst bless thine own word to us the teachings of scripture that they might encourage and strengthen us and that we might be in this way built up in our most holy faith oh Lord do thou enable us to keep on going to persevere unto the end gracious one we pray that thou wouldst not leave us in darkness but that thou wouldst grant to us the assurance that we need the faith that we need and the determination to follow the master for Jesus sake amen what willstibo that they mean who hadn't however could be anything about who they