

Sabbath School Today

With the 1888 Message Dynamic

Redemption in Romans

Lesson 8: Who Is the Man of Romans 7?

Is the man of Romans 7:7-25 a godless man, the unconverted man? Or is this chapter describing the experience of the normal born-again Christian? Some even say that Paul is here describing his own frustrating experience as a believer in Christ.

Certainly, Romans 7 portrays a man in difficulty, a man in distress, a man who seems doomed to defeat and failure in his spiritual life. He appears caught up in a conflict between his own sinful tendencies and desires on the one hand, and the just requirements of God's holy law on the other. We see here an account of temptations resisted but not overcome, of goals not reached, of purposes unfulfilled, of ideals held but not attained, of a victory that is greatly longed for but not gained, of a conflict that is terrible and that regularly ends in defeat. We see pictured here the experience of one that might be described as a born loser, a frustrated, defeated man. What a predicament! Who is this man, who apparently for years is unable to achieve, who lives in frustration and defeat?

Two main views have been held through the centuries: first, that the man of Romans 7 is the unregenerate, unconverted, carnal man whose heart is naturally in rebellion against God and His law. The other view is that the man of Romans 7 is Paul himself in his regenerate, converted experience, after he has come to know Christ. If this is true, then it is evidence that victory over temptation and sin is not available to Christians in this life. If Paul could not stop sinning, even through the power of Christ, it proves that no one can stop sinning.

The problem we encounter with both these lines of thought is that neither one stands up well under investigation.

Do unregenerate sinners confess that God's law is "holy, and just, and good" (7:12)? Do they acknowledge that God's law is spiritual, but that "I am carnal" (vs. 14)? Do unregenerate men say, "The good that I would I do not, but the evil which I would not, that I do (vs. 19)? Do unregenerate men say, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man" (vs. 22)? Most unregenerate people hate the law of God, and love sin. They will, not to do good, but to do evil. They certainly do not delight in the law of God after the inward man.

On the other hand, if the born-again Paul is writing about himself, why would he say, "I am carnal" (vs. 14) and then a few lines later write, "the carnal mind is enmity against God" (8:7)? Why would Paul say "I am sold under sin" (7:14), contradicting what he just wrote about "being then made free from sin" (6:18)? Why would Paul say that he found

it impossible to stop doing the evil he hated (7:15-23) and in the same discussion write “that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit (8:4)?

Why would Paul describe himself as being “in captivity to the law of sin” (7:23) and in the same discussion write “but now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness” (6:22)? The idea that Paul just couldn’t stop sinning, that he couldn’t quit swearing, lying, committing adultery, doesn’t harmonize with his other writings: 2 Corinthians 5:17, 10:5; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 3:20, 4:23 and 24; and especially Galatians 5:16, “This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall *not* fulfill the lust of the flesh.”

Are there no other alternatives? Yes, and it is a little idea derived from the 1888 message on the two covenants. Paul is describing the frustrations and defeats that inevitably follow those living under the old covenant.

Paul sums up the reason for defeat in Romans 7:25: “So then with the mind *I myself* serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.” *Ego autos* [I myself] would *never* be used to describe a *joint* effort or action, or a cooperative relationship between two persons [Christ and the believer]. It means emphatically, *I alone*. In Romans 7:25 it *means I without Christ*. It vividly describes a man under the old covenant, trying in his own strength to obey God’s law and become righteous. This was ancient Israel’s problem with their old covenant promise. “And why? Simply because Israel relied not on faith but on *what they could do*” (Rom. 9:32, Moffatt).

“The Man of Romans 7” is neither the converted or the unconverted Paul per se, but the corporate “I” of the fallen, sinful human race apart from Christ: this is the predicament of fallen humanity. “In me ... dwelleth no good thing” (Rom. 7:18). If “no good thing” is there, as I am part of the corporate body of Adam, all evil could dwell there. Nobody else is intrinsically any worse than I am.

George I. Butler, one of the leading brethren who opposed E. J. Waggoner’s view of the two covenants, wrote in the *Review and Herald*, “That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled *by us*,” instead of “... fulfilled *in us*” (Rom. 8:4). [1] Ellen G. White on numerous occasions, including in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pages 370-373, endorsed Waggoner’s view of the covenants.

The great mass of Seventh-day Adventist church members worldwide who have come out of the world, are “converted” in the sense that they have been baptized and go to church Sabbath after Sabbath, but who know no victory over sin and are burdened by sinful old covenant fear which motivates their trust in God.

The problem that God has to deal with is “indwelling sin” in His people today, not Adam’s condition in the Garden of Eden. The remnant church is “lukewarm.” It worships every Sabbath; but Laodicea is forced to confess, “That which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I

consent unto the law that it is good [Laodicea has long “consented” that the law is good!]. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. ... for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not” (Rom. 7:15-18).

The sinless Adam had no such problem. Merely for Christ to redeem Adam’s failure and stop with such a victory would mean that the church is doomed to perpetual lukewarmness, and the problem of sin that *dwells within* and compels us to sin can never be solved. Hence the incarnate Christ must “condemn sin *in* the flesh,” “abolish *in* His flesh the enmity” (Rom. 8:3; Eph. 2:15), which the sinless Adam never had to do.

While the old covenant was the promises of the people to obey God in their own strength, the new covenant is God’s promises to us. God’s covenant and His promises are one and the same. We need not make promises to God, but only to accept His promises to us. We accept these promises by faith, and this faith, being a heart response to Christ’s love revealed on Calvary, is a saving transaction. This faith that saves is a “*faith which worketh* [is motivated] by love” (Gal. 5:6). Thus this faith, which reconciles us to God, also reconciles us to His law, and thus makes us obedient to His law and will.

—Paul E. Penno

Endnote:

[1] George I. Butler, “The Righteousness of the Law Fulfilled *by Us*,” *Review and Herald*, May 14, 1889, pp. 313, 314 (emphasis added).

Notes:

Pastor Paul Penno’s video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

<https://youtu.be/2ehqujYxjQ8>

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