

REMARKS UPON ROMANS 7:7-24

By Gordon C. Olson (1907 – 1989)

This passage is a parenthesis in the wonderful Gospel discussions of the victorious Christian life presented in Chapter 6 and 7:1-6, and Chapter 8. It describes the humanistic struggle of an enlightened mind against the powerful dynamic of the habitual depravity which we have developed by our uninterrupted concentration upon self-gratification in one form or another. It certainly does not describe any kind of Christian experience through which we must pass or any kind of Christian experience in which we are to relax and think our-selves acceptable to God. It certainly does not represent what the Lord Jesus came to accomplish by His gruesome atoning death and glorious resurrection, nor what the Holy Spirit was given as a special crowning gift to attain within us.

This passage describes the solemn experiences of struggle and defeat of two classes of individuals: (1) Those as yet unsaved or unforgiven through repentance and the climax of saving faith, but in a state of enlightenment by considering the reasonable and rightful claims of God and their fellowmen as presented in the Moral Law, the Ten Commandments. Whenever the moral requirements of God are given thoughtful consideration by any moral being, whatever his standing in society may be, he always approves its rightfulness until he experiences defeat and begins to excuse himself. The truth of God and the created mind of man must always agree. This is the outer and the inner revelation, which is the basis of condemnation (Ro.1:20; 2:14-16). Being fully convinced that he ought to live according to God's reasonable requirements, such a one determines to break the law of habit and obey the truth which he has embraced. He makes a new discovery. "I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me" (Ro.7:21). The word law is simply used in its basic meaning as a rule of action, a formulating or a defining of something that is going on. Perhaps none of us really knows how strong we are physically because we have not lifted all that we are able to lift. In emergencies we are sometime amazed by what we can lift when we really have to. Just so, none of us knows the strength of our developed depravity of life as long as we continue living in it. But let one arise to challenge his inertia of depravity and he will discover to his enlightened amazement a new "law." This passage, then, is simply a struggle with the habits of our indulgences in our own strength and resources, without looking to or relying upon the glorious provisions of the Gospel.

That this is **not** a description of any kind of intended Christian experience is evident from the relaxed and energetic expressions which precede and follow this passage. For example, we have in Ro.6:2: "We who did die (instantly) to the sin, how as yet shall we live in it?" "Our old man (our former self) crucified together with (Him) (instantly), in order that might be rendered powerless (instantly) the body of sin (the body as belonging to or ruled by the power of sin)" (Ro.6:6). For sin shall not rule over you (have dominion over have power over, or be lord over), for ye are not (now) under law, but (or nay rather) under grace (loving-kindness or undeserved favor)" (Ro.6:14). "Having been (instantly) made free (or set at liberty) from the sin, ye were (instantly) made a slave (reduced to bondage or enslaved) to the righteousness (or purity of life)" (Ro. 6:18). "However at that very moment, having been (instantly) made a slave (reduced to bondage or enslaved) God, ye are (continually) having your fruit (conduct or actions) unto sanctification (moral purity of heart and life), and the end life everlasting" (Ro.6:22).

"Wherefore, my brethren, ye yourselves also have (instantly) become dead (or been put to death in relation) to the law through the body of Christ, unto the becoming yourselves (instantly) (married) to another, to the One who was caused to rise (instantly) out from among (the) dead, in order that we might bring forth fruit to God. For when we were (continuing) in the flesh, the passions of the sins, the (ones) through the law, were (constantly) in operation (or putting forth their power) in our members unto the bringing forth fruit to the death. However, at that very moment, we were (instantly) caused to cease (rendered idle or inoperative) from the law,

that having (instantly) died (or been separated with us) in which we were being (continually) held back (held fast or kept secure), so as to be ourselves (continually) as in newness of spirit and not (in) oldness of letter (the bare literal sense of slavish outward obedience)." (Ro.7:4-6). "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Ro.7:25).

"So then now (as the matter now stands) no condemnation (not one condemnatory sentence) to (or for) the (ones) in Christ Jesus; for the law of the Spirit of the life in Christ Jesus did (instantly) make thee free (or set thee free or at liberty) from the law of the sin and the death. For the weakness (or the without strength) of the law, in that it was (constantly) being weak (deficient in or without strength, powerless) through (used of the means, manner or formal cause) the flesh, God His own Son having sent in likeness (image or resemblance) of flesh of sin and concerning (or on account of) sin, He did condemn (or give judgment against) the sin in the flesh, so that (or in order that) the righteousness (the righteous acts or deeds) of the law (the ordinance of the moral law) might be fulfilled (might be filled to the full or made complete in every particular) in us, the (ones) who not according to (the) flesh are (constantly) walking about but according to (the) Spirit." (Ro. 8:1-4).

"But if Christ (is) in (or within) you, the body truly (is) dead (lifeless, inactive, or as one who has breathed his last) because of (or with a view to) sin, but the spirit life (real and genuine) because of (or on account of) righteousness (or purity of life)" (Ro.8:10). "For if according to (the) flesh ye are (constantly) living ye are about to be dying (about to be continually deprived of life real and genuine, also could be rendered, ye shall die or be dying, emphasizing the certainty), but if by (the) Spirit the doings of the body ye are (constantly) putting to death ye shall live" (Ro.8:13). For as many as by (the) Spirit of God are being (constantly) led (guided, directed, conducted, moved, or impelled), these sons of God are (or are being). For ye did not receive a spirit of bondage (or slavery) again unto fear (or, back into dread or terror), but (or nay rather) ye did receive a spirit of adoption (or adoption as son) in which we are crying out (crying aloud, speaking with a loud voice, or exclaiming) Abba, Father (or Abba the Father)" (Ro.8:14-15). The Syriac word "Abba" is prefixed to the Greek word for Father to emphasize a special close relationship with God. It was used as an expression of intimate filial affection and respect in addressing an earthly father in all parental tenderness. Slaves of a household were not permitted to use the title in addressing their master. In the above quotations, we have represented sudden or climactic tenses by "(instantly)," indicating that the action was instantaneous, and durative or continuous action in either past or present time by "(continually)" or "(constantly)." Optional renderings or explanatory notes were included in parentheses, as were words supplied to complete the meaning, placed in italics in our common versions.

The translations have been made to convey as closely as possible the thought of easily readable English. We are seeking to determine exactly what the Holy Spirit intended to convey to us in giving us these many passages. Many more of a similar nature could be given from other New Testament epistles.

Who does not see that the defeatism of Ro.7:7-24 is in direct contrast to the descriptions of these wonderful passages from the Word of God? Who does not see the radical difference between the words "O wretched man that I am" and "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord?" Who does not see that it is a case of being plugged into the source of power which is the very essence of the glorious Gospel and not being so connected? This isolation from the power of the Holy Spirit in energetic self-struggle is summarized in Ro.7:21- 23, as follows: "I am finding (am coming upon, meeting with, discovering or detecting) then the law, that, to me purposing to be doing the good (the honorable or right), to me the evil is (constantly) at hand (present or near- properly, to lie beside). For I am delighting (or rejoicing) with myself in the law of God according to the inner man, but I am perceiving (seeing, discerning, observing, discovering by use, or knowing by experience) another (a different) law in my members, a warring (or opposing — to make a military expedition or take the field against anyone) with the law of my mind (the faculty of perceiving and understanding) and a leading me away captive (or subjugating me) by means of (in or within) the law of the sin which is in my members."

The problem is not a want of natural ability to deny one's self and obey God, but rather a want of a continuing willingness to do so. The Lord Jesus said: "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Lk.13:3, 5). The Apostle Paul declared that "God... now commandeth all men everywhere to repent (or to be repenting)" (Acts 17:30). Certainly such reasonable and insistent demands plainly reveal man's ability to turn from all sin and devote himself to God and his fellowmen. The Lord Jesus solemnly admonished His over-confident disciples: "Keep on (continually) watching and keep on (continually) praying lest ye (suddenly) enter into temptation; indeed the spirit (is) willing (eager or ready) but the flesh (is) weak (not strong, morally weak, inefficient, without continuing energy or determination in a moral or spiritual sense)" (Mt.26:41). See also Ro.5:6; the use of a kindred noun with the same meaning in Ro.6:19; 8:26; He. 4:15; and that of the verb in Ro.8:3. The latter noun also appears in II Co.12:5, 9 and 10, and the verb in 12:10, where in recognition of weakness faith brings strength and power by looking to Christ. Just as the Lord Jesus "was crucified out of weakness, but is living out of the power of God," or was raised from the dead by the power of God, just so "we ourselves are weak in Him but shall live with Him out of the power of God" (II Co.13:4). Christ "toward you is not weak but is powerful in you" (II Co.13:3).

This passage also describes the solemn experiences of: (2) Those who have been genuinely saved and have experienced the full deliverance from all conscious sin through the illuminated knowledge of the atoning love of Christ, but have not been taught nor learned the secret that the believer is to be "kept by the power of God through faith" (I Pe.1:5). "Having put off from yourselves (climactically) every weight and the easily-besetting sin, with steadfastness let us keep on running the lying before us race, looking away (continually) unto (or fixing our gaze upon) the of the faith leader and perfecter Jesus, in view of the lying before Him joy endured a cross, shame having despised, at the right hand of the throne of God having come to be seated" (He.12:1-2). This joy that was set before our blessed Saviour as He trod earth's road in prayerful weakness was the vision that man would not only find forgiveness through His atoning death, but glorious deliverance and victory over sin through the gift of the Holy Spirit to indwell the believer. God could not in love plan a half-way salvation. Man was designed to enjoy daily fellowship with his Creator. Reconciliation through repentance and faith restores this fellowship through an intimate relationship with the suffering and risen Saviour through the illumination and agency of the Holy Spirit. Faith is always a total committal of the will in a personal realization of truth. Saving faith is this total committal to the sufferings of Christ on the Cross as the only means of obtaining the forgiveness. In this state of mind we cast ourselves at the foot of the Cross, with the cry: "God, be merciful (or propitious) to me the sinner" (Lk.18:13). This results in free pardon from the compassionate heart of the Father. The faith that brings daily deliverance or spiritual victory is likewise a total committal of the will in a personal realization that the risen life of Christ is intended to be the source of our spiritual life through the indwelling Holy Spirit. This total committal is not a once—for—all climax but a continuous attitude of will which springs from our innermost being. It is to be fully persuaded that such has been the moral character of our lives that momentous evil tendencies and habits of indulgence of one form or another have been developed and forged into our personalities, which will arise at instants of temptation to influence our wills to choose self-gratification rather than to abide firmly in our resolve to live in self-denial according to the will of God.

Reconciliation to God by its very nature involves repentance on man's part, which is an unreserved willingness to turn from all sin and be conformed to the loving will of our benevolent Creator. The argument as to whether we will live for sin or holiness has then been settled. If we must continually argue with ourselves as to whether we are going to serve God or not, where is the evidence of repentance? The Thessalonian Christians turned "toward (or facing) God from (or away from) the idols to yield obedience (continually) to God living and true" (I Th.1:9). James pronounces blessing upon "a man who is enduring temptation (or trial)" (1:12), and then outlines the procedure and consequences of sin: "Each man is tempted by his own desires being drawn out and enticed (or allured as by a bait), then the desire having conceived (seized or caught up as a prey, climactic) is bearing

(producing or giving birth to) sin, and the sin having come to maturity (or completion, having run its course or completed its action, climactic) is bringing forth (or giving birth to) death. Do not keep on being led astray (or deceived), my beloved brethren.” (I Th.1:14-16).

All the children of God, then, have a mind to obey God and oppose sin. They have repented of sin and thus are not committed to the pathway of supreme self-gratification. They are able to obey God and do not have to submit to the strongest motive. When an occasion for sinful gratification is encountered, the mind at first declares against this diversion and must be able to direct its attention away from emotional development and involvement. Generally, however, the memory of past gratifications will return to haunt the soul and clamor for renewed attention. This is “being drawn out and enticed.” If there is not an instant directing of the mind to our relationship with the risen Christ, to kindle within us the supreme motive for deliverance, in all probability our emotions will be allowed to kindle themselves to the point of inner conflict, with the loss of Divine radiance. If the will succumbs to the increasing emotional tempo and begins to make excuses while concentrating on furthering this development, then a conception of the process of sin in the given emotional area has taken place and will bring forth its full development with dire consequences. The passage in Ro.7:7-24 would describe such a conflict in the life of a Christian who was not aware of, or who had not learned the secret of, that instant direction of the mind in faith to the risen Christ to draw from His power for spiritual victory. He has not learned the admonition: “The things above keep on (continually) directing your minds to, not the things upon the earth” (Col.3:2). He thinks that he shall have victory over temptation by doing battle with it in his own strength, not realizing the tremendous dynamic of his own depravity which supreme self-gratification has fostered. Inner disturbances and spiritual wounds will always result, with defeat and disappointment the common experience.

Contrary to this, God has designed that His children should know by experience “Christ in (or within) you, the hope of glory” (Col.1:27). “We ourselves all, with an unveiled face the glory of (the) Lord beholding for ourselves as in a mirror, the same image are being (continually) transformed into from glory to glory, even as from (the) Lord (the) Spirit” (II Co.3:18). As the Christian is confronted with multitudes of occasions to depart from that walk pleasing to God, he must look to his risen Saviour for deliverance before his emotions are allowed to assert themselves or before his mind begins to reason away the force of truth, or he will involve himself in a struggle which will probably bring defeat, with all the consequences of guilt. Having a true knowledge of his own tendencies and weakness of purpose in times of crisis, he looks away to his loving Saviour to fight his spiritual battles for him and makes the happy discovery that “when I am weak, then am I strong” (II Co.12:10), a strange paradox. When we feel ourselves weak enough to need help, we look to God and obtain more than ever we imagine, even to the point that we can “take pleasure in infirmities,” and even “glory” in them “that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (12:9). “If therefore the Son should set you free (climactic), really free ye will be” (Jn.8:36). “Where the Spirit of (the) Lord (is), liberty (or freedom)” (II Co.3:17). This is the deliverance that the Lord Jesus came to bestow.

Underlining is used to indicate Scripture.

Scriptures are translated directly from the Greek text, and are not restructured grammatically for readability, but for accuracy of meaning. Some Greek tenses and some explanatory words and phrases are identified in parentheses for better understanding and clarity.