

Who Shall Deliver Me?

A Study on Romans 7:20-25

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One of the most shocking moments in a Christian's life is when he discovers how sinful he really is. There comes a time when a believer realizes that he has a force for evil in him that is so powerful that even as a saved man he cannot overcome it in his own strength.

A Christian must come to this place where he sees no good in himself, and where he realizes that all self-effort cannot deliver him from sin or enable him to live the Christian life. He must be brought to an end of himself and then cast himself wholly on God for deliverance from sin in his daily experience.

This is the lesson that the Apostle Paul had to learn in Romans 7:7-25. He loved the Mosaic Law and longed to keep the spiritual requirements of the Law. But God used the Law to show him how sinful he really was. Paul had been absolutely convinced that he could keep the righteousness of the Law in his own strength and self-effort. But God brought him to the end of himself by showing him his utter inability and helplessness to keep the Law in his own strength, and by convincing him that he needed outside help.

The discovery that Paul made was that of indwelling sin (Rom. 7:18: "In my flesh dwelleth no good thing!"). He longed to keep the Law, but could not do it because of this indwelling sin. There was nothing wrong with the Law; the problem was with Paul and his own wretchedness.

PAUL ACKNOWLEDGES THE LAW AND SIN — Romans 7:21-23

"I find [am finding] then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is [constantly] present with me." Paul found in himself this principle for evil, the sin nature, even though he was a saved man. When he desired to do the good of the Law, he found in himself this sin principle which opposed him.

A failure to acknowledge that evil is still present in the child of God can make shipwreck of a person's life. This is one of the reasons that many Christians crack up mentally. They try to live the Christian life but find only conflict. They do not realize that this is a normal experience to teach dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

“For I delight [sympathetic rejoicing] in the law of God after the inward man.” “The law of God” refers to the Mosaic Law (Lk. 2:23,24). The “inward man” means one’s inmost personality which is influenced by the new nature. As a saved man, with his new nature, Paul loved the Mosaic Law because it was a reflection of God’s holy character.

“But I see another law in my members.” While Paul loved the Mosaic Law, he became aware of another strong force within him — the law or principle of indwelling sin.

“Warring against the law of my mind.” The law of sin was constantly and habitually warring against the principle (law) of Paul’s mind. His mind was a part of his personality that was influenced by the new nature. His new nature desired to keep the Law but the old sin nature prevented him from accomplishing this.

“And bringing me into captivity to the law [principle] of sin which is in my members.” There was a constant struggle between the new nature and the sin nature when Paul tried to keep the commands of the Law in his flesh. The result was defeat, discouragement, and an inability in his flesh to keep the righteous requirements of the Law. He was made a captive or prisoner of the sin nature. The harder he tried, the more discouraged and defeated he became. He was sincere and earnest, but he was trying to produce the righteousness of the Law in his own strength and the sin nature overtook him. At this point he had not learned that God had provided the Holy Spirit to live the Christian life in him.

Andrew Murray said,

“God works to will and he is ready to work to do but, alas, many Christians misunderstand this. They think that because they have the will, it is enough, and that now they are able to do. This is not so. The new will is a permanent gift and attribute of the new nature but the power to do is not a permanent gift but must be received each moment from the Holy Spirit. It is the man who is conscious of his own impotence as a believer who will learn that by the Holy Spirit he can lead a holy life.”

PAUL’S CRY OF DESPAIR — Romans 7:24

“O wretched man that I am!” The word “wretched” has the idea of exhaustion because of hard labor. This is a beautiful picture of Paul struggling with his flesh, to the point of exhaustion, to make it obey the Law.

What honest Christian has not made this cry many times as he finds himself in the struggle of sin and self-effort? I have been so fed up with my life as a Christian that I have thrown myself over my bed and cried out, "I'm so horribly sinful!" God brings his children to such a point to teach us dependence on him.

Paul came to the end of himself. He saw himself in relation to the requirements of God's Law and was displeased with his own inability to deliver himself from the situation. Only when he came to the end of self-effort and discovered his own sinfulness did he cry out for deliverance!

Paul came to realize that the flesh (sin nature) could not please God and that his best efforts could not do so either. The flesh is not only sinful but it is also helpless. Paul learned that sin is not only doing something wrong, it is also trying to do something right in our own strength. This struggle with fleshly effort is taught in the lives of Old Testament saints:

Jacob: Jacob had to learn this lesson. Remember how he struggled at the brook of Peniel to get God (Angel of Jehovah) to bless him (Gen. 32:24-32). He had his own plans and expected God to bless them. God touched his thigh and put it out of joint to show Jacob the folly of his self-effort and his need to cling to God. For the rest of his life he had a limp to remind him that he was to trust in God and not in his own efforts.

This is a picture of how we make our plans and programs, and work everything out saying, "Now, Lord, bless this!" Frequently there is no blessing because it was self-effort, and we experience defeat.

Abraham: God had promised Abraham that he would give him a son, through Sarah, to fulfill the covenant that he had made with him. Years went by and Abraham had no son. So, in complete sincerity, with the best of motives, and with the deepest desire to do God's will, he tried to help God fulfill his promise. Abraham took an Egyptian girl named Hagar and had a child by her — Ishmael. This self-effort brought much unhappiness to the home of Abraham. Ishmael and his descendants have been a plague upon the Jews until this very hour. Thirteen years later God brought Issac to Abraham and Sarah. This is a lesson on how Christians sometimes run ahead of the Lord.

Moses: Moses learned the futility of self-effort and his own sinfulness when he tried to deliver Israel after he "graduated from the University of Egypt." He stood there on the steps, with his diploma in his hand, trained in all the knowledge of the Egyptians, feeling qualified to be used of God to be the deliverer of Israel. He knew that he had been called to that from his birth, because his mother had told him the stories of his birth, and he set out to do the work God had called him to do — in his own effort. Within forty-eight hours he became a murderer instead of a missionary and had to flee from the face of Pharaoh. Then

God took him away and placed him in the desert for forty years to teach him dependence on God and not on the flesh. This is a picture of how men trust in their education, culture, wisdom, background, etc., and find only defeat.

“Who shall deliver me from [out from] the body of this death?” Paul acknowledged his hopeless and helpless condition, and called for help outside himself. He wanted deliverance from the power of sin in his life. He did not ask how he might deliver himself or how he might be delivered — he asked for a deliverer!

The term “body of death” depicts a murderer. It was a Roman custom to chain the murdered person to the murderer. He had to carry around the putrefying corpse as a penalty until the death of the dead became the death of the living. This is a horrible picture of the sin nature which brings death, and which the Christian cannot lose in this lifetime, though he may control it.

In this context, Paul was asking specifically about deliverance from the power of sin in his daily life, but he also looked to the future when he would be delivered from the presence of sin at the coming of Jesus Christ, for he said, “Who shall deliver me out from the body of this death?”

PAUL’S CRY OF VICTORY — Romans 7:25

“I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” In all his defeat and discouragement, Paul saw a way out: he could be progressively delivered from the power of sin in his experience. Deliverance comes not through keeping the Law but through the person of Jesus Christ. Paul looked outside his own sin and self-effort for deliverance. He realized that Victory over sin comes by acknowledging the person and work of Christ for sanctification as well as for justification!

Occupation with Christ, allowing Christ to live his life through us by the Holy Spirit is the key to the Christian walk. Christianity is not just trying to live a life like Christ, nor is it just trying to be Christlike, nor is it simply Christ giving us the power to live a life like his. Christianity is Christ dwelling in the Christian, living his own life through the Christian:

“When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory” (Col. 3:4).

“So then with the mind [new nature] I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh [sin nature] the law of sin.” Paul drew a conclusion about his life as he tried to make the flesh obedient by keeping the Mosaic Law. As long as the Christian is in this human body,

his actions will be a mixture of good and evil. With all his heart Paul wanted to keep the Law in his new nature, but the flesh [sin nature], until and unless subdued by the Spirit, would keep him from producing the righteous requirements of the Law. Paul was a realist and knew that this conflict would occur as long as he was in the flesh.

The apostle Paul understood that there was a conflict with sin in him and in every Christian. It is a fact of life, a normal Christian experience to have conflict with sin, but it is abnormal Christian experience to try to solve the problem in our own strength. It must be dealt with in a supernatural manner as we trust the Holy Spirit to work in us. Other Christians have experienced this conflict with sin:

George Whitefield: “My heart is half devil and half beast.”

John Bradford: “The sinful John Bradford: a very painted hypocrite: the most miserable, hard-hearted, and unthankful sinner, John Bradford.”

Bishop Berkley: “I cannot pray, but I sin; I cannot preach, but I sin; I cannot administer, nor receive the holy sacrament, but I sin. My very repentance needs to be repented of: and the tears I shed need washing in the blood of Christ.”

Augustus Toplady (author of *Rock of Ages*): “Upon a review of the past year, I desire to confess that my sinfulness has been exceeding great; my sins still greater; God’s mercies greater than both. My shortcomings and my misdoings, my unbelief and want of love, would sink me into the lowest hell, was not Jesus my righteousness and my Redeemer.”

CONCLUSION

No person can know the delivering power of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit until he has first come to Christ and received him as personal Lord and Savior. Without Christ, a person is separated from God, has no forgiveness from the guilt and the penalty of sin, has no hope, and is under God’s wrath — and if this condition continues, he will spend eternity in the Lake of Fire. Jesus Christ alone can save you from this horrible fate and give you the power to live a Christian life.