



Conducted by
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“When we read Romans chapter 7 it would seem that the Apostle Paul had a dual personality. Is this true of all Christians?”

Paul introduces his main argument in this section of the Scripture by referring to the married state. He reminds his readers that the woman is bound by the law to her husband so long as he lives; if while her husband lives she marries another, then she commits adultery. If, however, her husband dies then she is free from the law that bound her to him, and she is then free to marry another.

He then goes on to contrast the letter of the law with the life in Christ. The Christian, he argues, is freed from the law, the letter of which bound him, and is now ‘married’ to Christ, the law is ‘dead’ so far as the Christian is concerned, so his

'marriage to Christ' becomes valid (Paul does not argue the point here, but it would follow that if a Christian turns again to sin then that would be tantamount to 'spiritual adultery' because it is obvious that Christ, to whom the Christian is 'married,' cannot die). It is at this point that Paul develops his argument concerning the law and sin, which in turn leads to the argument which is the basis of the question.

The Law and Sin

In order to understand this part of the argument we have to use a little imagination. Take the case of a person whose life is not governed by any written law from any higher authority. That person may lust, as Paul states here, after another man's wife or possessions and may kill in order to satisfy his lust. There is no written law which tells him that his actions are wrong, and so he continues quite happily in them, believing that his behaviour is acceptable; he, in fact, becomes a law unto himself, and sin lies dormant so far as he is concerned.

If, however, a law emerges which condemns covetousness and murder as sinful, then the 'life' of acceptability of his previous actions is shattered; sin which had lain dormant now revives because the awakening of conscience and moral responsibility has come through the law; so, Paul argues, the conduct which had seemed to be 'life' now becomes 'death.' He had been 'dead' before but did not know it; now he has discovered that he was spiritually dead. Paul puts it like this, "But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence" (v18). Concupiscence means 'sexual lust; desire for worldly things,' so what Paul is saying is that the law which said, "thou shalt not covet" made him lust the more because sin took occasion by the commandment and wrought its havoc in him as in so many other people. But haven't we seen on so many occasions when people have been told **not** to do something that they do it the more? It is not the instruction which is wrong; it is sin at work. Oh, the grinding, blinding power of sin.

Paul is at pains to point out that the law was not the vehicle of sin, for he says, "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good" (v.12). Also in v.14 he says, "For we know that the law is spiritual"; indeed, it must have been, because it was Spirit-caused, and Spirit-given, and like the Holy Spirit; it was given by God Himself. No, it was sin which was the 'great deceiver', just as it had been in the Garden of Eden (Read also 1 Cor. 10: 3ff). What the law did was to reveal to the conscience the exceeding sinfulness of sin; this revelation was seen in the violation of God's law, because it is the excesses of sin which reveal its real nature.

Paul had every reason to bitterly regret the deceit of sin. We can almost hear Satan talking to him before he became a Christian, "Go on, Saul, you are doing God's will; it cannot be wrong to imprison and kill Christians if you are doing God's will". Doesn't he deceive us in the same way? "Go on, Christian, it can't be wrong to take some of your employer's things; after all, you earn his profits for him". So the deceit spreads, and if allowed to continue it results in ruined lives. It starts as nothing; it ends in tragedy. **That** is the exceeding sinfulness of sin. What happens is that our spiritual perceptions are dulled and blinded by sin; not only so, but the lives of millions of unregenerate people are mortgaged to sin simply because they are blinded by it, as Paul says, "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (2 Cor. 4:4). Do we need any more convincing as to the awfulness of sin?

The Dual Personality

There is a great deal of controversy as to what Paul is describing in verses 14–25 of Romans chapter 7. It is not for me to give a scholarly dissertation on the Greek words which Paul uses because I am not a Greek scholar, but I have unravelled the

meaning of the words to my own satisfaction and understanding, and I pass the thoughts on to you for what they are worth.

When Paul says, "I am carnal, sold under sin" (v.14) he means by 'carnal' that he is 'fleshly', and 'sold under sin' comes from a verb "to sell", and if we look at Matt. 13:46 we shall see what is meant. Jesus there says that the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant man seeking good pearls; He then goes on, "Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it" (Matt. 13: 45, 46). In other words, the deal was closed and there was a state of completion. Therefore, when Paul says "I am sold under sin", he means that sin has closed the deal and now owns its slave. What he seems to be depicting is man in his unregenerate state.

It is both interesting and instructive to notice what Paul wrote to the Church at Corinth. In 1 Cor. 3:1 he says, "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as spiritual (PNEUMATIKOS), but as unto carnal (SARKIKOS), even as unto babes in Christ". Again in 3:3 he says, "For ye are yet carnal". The word SARKIKOS means, 'one who lives according to the flesh', so what Paul is saying is that those who are yet carnal have given way to the flesh as if they were still unregenerate. We have a picture, then, of so-called regenerated people responding to the world and the flesh in such a manner that Paul has to think of them as still in their unregenerate state, so much so, in fact, that he wants to feed them from the meat of the Word and finds himself unable to do so because they are envious, strife-ridden, divided, bitter, engaging in gross excesses of the flesh, and seemingly caring little for the Lord who had died for them.

Comparison

We now have to compare the two Scriptures we have looked at. On the one hand, as we have seen, we have Christians at Corinth who were supposedly regenerated people but yet by fleshly pursuits and worldliness appearing to be **unregenerated**, and in fact stated as such by Paul. On the other hand, we have the Apostle seeming to say that he is split in two; with the mind he serves God, but with the flesh he serves sin; a sort of Jekyll and Hyde character.

We can readily believe that many of the Corinthian Christians were as Paul depicts them, but can we **really** believe that the Apostle who could write to the Christians at Rome "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your spiritual service. And be not conformed to this world", etc., (Rom. 12:1,2), would succumb to his fleshly desires on all occasions, especially if they were in conflict with God's will? No, it is too much to ask. Remember, we are talking about the man who said, "For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. 6:19,20), and also in the same letter, "But I keep under my body and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Cor.9:26,27).

In Conclusion

My own conclusion is this. In Rom. 7:14ff Paul, as a regenerated man, is recalling his pre-conversion, unregenerated state. The clue which supports this view is in v.14 when he says, "but I am carnal, **sold under sin**", and we have already commented that this phrase would mean, "owned by sin (Satan)", precisely the state we **all** were in before we came to Christ. A point which sometimes escapes us is that though we are sinful men we are not **totally depraved**; the Gentiles were able to do 'by nature' the things contained in the law, even though they did not have the law. Even as sinners, we know with the mind the **good** we **should** do, but we are not able to do that which we know because we are 'held by sin'. What a terrible state the sinner is in! And I believe it is precisely this that Paul is trying to show.

There is just one other point. Christians have said to me, “Well it helps me personally if I can realise that Paul failed in the flesh, just as I do”. My answer to that would be that we should think carefully as to whether we are seeing the Apostle as a peg on which to hang our own weaknesses.

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THE HUMAN EYE

Charles Darwin wrote in his book **The Origin of Species**: “To suppose that the eye, with all its inimitable contrivances for adjusting the focus to different distances, for admitting different amounts of light, and for the correction of spherical and chromatic aberration, could have been found by natural selection, seems, I freely confess, absurd in the highest possible degree.” Richmond L. Gregory in his book **Eye and Brain** commented: “The problem of how eyes have developed has presented a major challenge to the Darwinian theory of evolution by Natural Selection”.

The human eye is an amazing optical instrument. Its major parts are the cornea, aqueous humour, pupil, crystalline lens, vitreous humour, retina and optic nerve. Take the retina, for example. The name comes from an early word meaning ‘net’ or ‘cobweb tunic’ from the appearance of its blood vessels. The retina is the innermost layer or coating at the back of the eyeball which is sensitive to light and in which the optic nerve terminates. It has two kinds of light – receptor cells – the rods and the cones – named after their appearance as viewed with a microscope. The plump cones, some seven million of them, are for detailed examination in bright light; the slender rods, almost eighteen times as numerous, are for dim light. These cells actually convert light into electrical pulses which are transmitted through the optic nerve to the brain. Gregory has written: “It is worth trying to imagine the size of the receptors of the human eye. The smallest, one micron, is only about two wavelengths of red light in size. One could not ask for much better than that. Even so, the visual acuity of the hawk is four times better than man.”

One scientist has been moved to write: “Despite some short-comings, the eye remains one of the most wondrous creations in nature. The astounding co-ordination of the various parts, the ability of the eye to adjust to the manifold demands of varying light conditions, its capacity to switch focus instantaneously from a book to plane streaking across the sky at supersonic speed – these are reasons enough for man to regard his eyes with an awe bordering on reverence.”

“He that formed the eye, shall he not see (Psalm 94:9)?”

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