

# THE PROFESSOR

## WRETCHED?

### **OH! WRETCHED MAN THAT I AM! WHO SHALL DELIVER ME FROM THE BODY OF THIS DEATH? Romans 7:25**

Is it even possible to conceive that Paul would consider his life as a Christian to be wretched?

We ended the last article *with the statement:*

**Surely the Word of God is not that inconsistent!**

Oh! Wretched man that I am!

↪ In all these things we are more than conquerors!

Oh! Wretched man that I am!

↪ I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!

Oh! Wretched man that I am!

↪ Thanks be to God who always causes us to triumph!

Oh! Wretched man that I am!

↪ Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

Oh! Wretched man that I am!

↪ I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.

### **Will the real Paul please stand up?**

My Sunday School teacher was really a wonderful person. She would never have knowingly put anyone on the road to spiritual destruction. But when she read the seventh chapter of Romans that day in class, she was quite persuasive. As an eighteen year old freshman in college it all sounded so hopeless. What I want to do; I can't do. What I hate; I can't help doing. I know what's right and agree with it. However, there is a law that says "something" controls my body; something over which I have no control. This something is called sin. In conclusion, the teacher said, "This is the life of the Christian until the resurrection or the rapture and the glorification of our bodies."

Over the next three years in a secular university everything I believed was attacked and destroyed. She was right, I was most miserable. I was wretched. In frustration I decided there

was no God and, therefore, no reason to keep on being wretched. For most of the next eight months I was relatively happy. Whatever I felt like doing, I did. At least I was satisfying one part of my being - the flesh.

Just before Easter of my senior year I was genuinely and wonderfully born again. But something was wrong. *I was not wretched*. I tried to be. Others tried to make me wretched – and almost succeeded. After I received the fullness of the Spirit and was called to preach there were those who tried to calm me down – they are still trying. For about ten years I struggled to understand what the difference was between those who were "wretched Christians," and obviously most holy, and those of us who just couldn't quite make it. Thank God, I discovered the answer. I don't have to feel guilty for being deliriously happy as a Christian.

First of all, I discovered that Paul could not have been talking about his life as a Christian in Romans 7. Second, I discovered that Paul, himself, was deliriously, even, ecstatically happy as a Christian. Finally, I discovered that, because of the finished work of Christ on Calvary, the only suffering we, as believers, must experience is that which comes from dying to the flesh or as the consequence of following the leading of the Spirit.

I am well aware of the controversies surrounding Romans 7. Some even say it doesn't really matter what Paul's perspective was. It mattered to me as a teenager. It matters in our witnessing. How could anyone say to another person, "You should be just like me," as Paul did to king Agrippa, and mean, "You should be as wretched as I am," with any conviction at all?

Perhaps the best thing to do is to jump right into the middle of the controversy. What was Paul not talking about? The word "spirit" is used only once in the chapter. Paul simply makes the comment in verse 6 that we are delivered from the law to "serve in newness of spirit." Paul doesn't mention the spirit again until chapter 8. Obviously Paul is **NOT** talking here about the Spirit/flesh conflict as he does in Galatians chapter five.

The conflict which Paul describes is between the flesh and the mind. In verses 21-23 there are three laws mentioned - the law of God, the law of sin which is in my members and the law of my mind.

## I. The Law of God

**Romans 7:1-6** deals with the relationship of the believer with the "Law of God." The law has dominion (gr. *kurieuo* – lordship) over a man as long as he lives. Using the example of marriage Paul declares that, even as a wife is free to remarry after the death of her husband, we, through Christ's death, are free from the law in order to be married to another, "even to Him who is raised from the dead."

In **verses 7-13** Paul questions the validity of the law. Since it is by the law we know sin, is the law itself sin? His answer is, "God forbid!" Then he explains that the law was ordained for life but, because of sin in the human heart, it produced death. The problem isn't in the law, it is in man. The law of God is good.

**Psalms 19:7-11** The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. <sup>8</sup> The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. <sup>9</sup> The fear of the LORD is clean,

enduring forever; the judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether. <sup>10</sup> They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. <sup>11</sup> Moreover, by them Thy servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

The law wasn't given in the expectation that humans would keep it. God knew the impossibility of fallen man keeping the law. That is why He gave the sacrificial rituals. **Romans 8:3** speaks of "What the law **could not** do" (emphasis mine) and **Hebrews 7:19** defines what the law could not do. "For the law made nothing perfect ..." In **Galatians 3:21** Paul raises the valid question, "Is the law then against the promises of God?" Then he answers his own question. "God forbid: for **if there had been a law given which could have given life**, verily righteousness should have been by the law." (emphasis mine).

Since the law could "make nothing perfect" and it could not give life, then why was the law given?

**Romans 7:13** Therefore did that which is good become *a cause of death* for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.

**The law revealed sin.**

**The law revealed human weakness.**

**The law exposed the flesh.**

Once I saw a building under construction with a number of strings attached at various points and extending to the ground. I asked a worker what the strings were for. He told me that a mistake had been made in the foundation of the building. By the time the third floor was in place it became obvious the building was out of plumb. The strings were plumb bobs used to show how much the building was off. Obviously, the strings were not going to correct the problem. In fact, the building had to be destroyed so the foundations could be rebuilt.

In the same way, the law revealed the **iniquity** in the hearts of men, but the law could not correct the problem.

**Iniquity** - heb. *avon*; from *avah* = bend, twist, distort. "The derivative noun *avon* occurs with only the derived, abstract theological notion of the root: 'infraction, crooked behavior, perversion, iniquity etc.'" (Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, VOL. II, p. 650)

Truly, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (**Jeremiah 17:9**).

## II. The Law of Sin in My Members

"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me." (**Psalms 51:5**)

These words of the Psalmist David can be said of every human who has been born from Adam to the present with the exception of Jesus.

**Romans 3:10-12** As it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; <sup>11</sup> THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; <sup>12</sup> ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE."

We often say of someone who is "lost", that is, one who has not accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior, "He is a good man." The Bible is explicit – without Jesus no one is good and no one does good.

**Proverbs 21:4** (NKJV) A haughty look, a proud heart, *and* the plowing of the wicked *are* sin.

(If even the morally neutral act of plowing is called sin when done by a wicked person, then surely anything else done by the wicked is sin by definition.)

The law of sin is clearly expressed in **Romans 7:19-20**:

For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish. <sup>20</sup> But if I am doing the very thing I do not wish, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

The good.....gr. *agathos* - moral goodness  
That I would...gr. *thelo* - wish, want, desire, will take pleasure in  
I do not.....gr. *poieo* - do, make  
The evil.....gr. *kakos* - evil, bad, destructive, damaging, unjust  
That I do.....gr. *prasso* - accomplish, do

There are some subtle differences in the two words translated "do" in the verse quoted above. First of all, the word "*poieo*" is used almost exclusively with "good" conduct and the word "*prasso*" with bad. Second, since the word "*poieo*" includes the idea of "make," it might be inferred that it deals with single actions while the word "*prasso*" deals with continuing actions.

**This is the "Law of Sin" Paul talks about in Romans 7:21,23. Man, without God, is incapable of doing anything good no matter how much he "wills" it.**

**In the next article, we will look at the "Law of the Mind."**