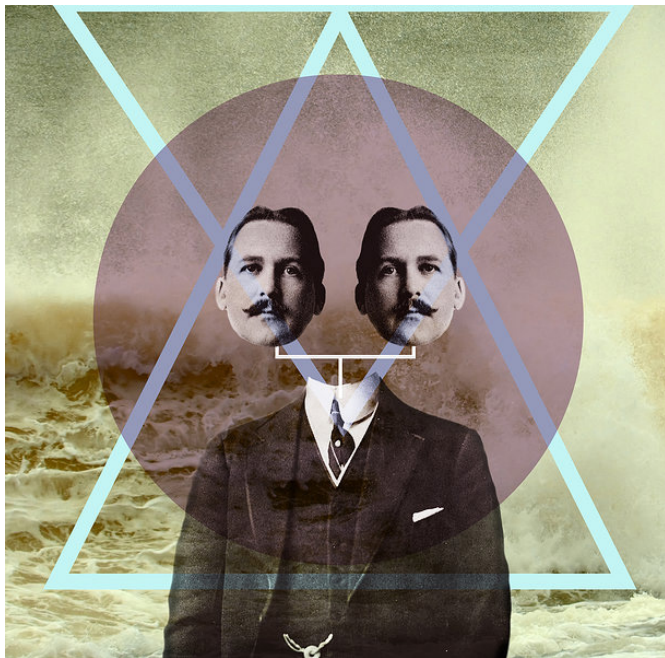


ROMANS Part 59

Chapter 7:15-25



For what I am effecting I know not, for not what I will, this I am putting into practice, but what I am hating, this I am doing. 16 Now if what I am not willing, this I am doing, I am conceding that the law is ideal. 17 Yet now it is no longer I who am effecting it, but Sin making its home in me. 18 For I am aware that good is not making its home in me (that is, in my flesh), for to will is lying beside me, yet to be effecting the ideal is not. 19 For it is not the good that I will that I am doing, but the evil that I am not willing, this I am putting into practice. 20 Now if what I am not willing, this I am doing, it is no longer I who am effecting it, but Sin which is making its home in me. 21 Consequently, I am finding the law that, at my willing

to be doing the ideal, the evil is lying beside me. 22 For I am gratified with the law of God as to the man within, 23 yet I am observing a different law in my members, warring with the law of my mind, and leading me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. 24 A wretched man am I! What will rescue me out of this body of death? Grace! 25 I thank God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Consequently, then, I myself, with the mind, indeed, am slaving for God's law, yet with the flesh for Sin's law.

I think that one of the first things they tell you at Alcoholics Anonymous is that you're powerless against the enemy Alcohol. Let me get onto Google and see if I'm right.

Okay, I'm back from Google and it looks as though I've hit the mark. Many organizations use the 12-step program developed by AA to help people with alcohol, drugs, and other compulsive addictions, such as Facebook. The heart of the personal recovery program is contained in twelve steps describing the experience of the earliest members of the AA Society. Here are the first two steps, which are pertinent to today's discussion:

1. *We admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable.*
2. *Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.*

In Romans 7:15-18-24, it is as though Paul has walked into a 12-Step program for the first time, introducing himself to the circle:

PAUL: Hello. My name is Paul.

GROUP: Hello, Paul.

PAUL: Not what I will, this I am putting to practice, but what I am hating, *this* I am doing.

GROUP: Amen, bro.

PAUL: I am conceding that the law is ideal.

GROUP: Yup.
 PAUL: It is no longer I who am effecting it!
 GROUP: Ha, ha! Right on.
 PAUL: It's Sin making its home in me.
 GROUP: Kind of like you're possessed.
 PAUL: Good is *not* making it's home in me.
 GROUP: You already implied that.
 PAUL: That is, in my flesh.
 GROUP: We knew what you meant.
 PAUL: For to will is lying beside me, yet to be effecting the ideal is not.
 GROUP: You kind of said that already.
 PAUL: For it is not the good that I will that I am doing, but the evil that I am not willing, this I am putting into practice.
 GROUP: Got it.
 PAUL: Now if what I am not willing, this I am doing, it is no longer I who am effecting it, but Sin which is making its home in me.
 GROUP: Kind of like Sin making its home in you.
 PAUL: Consequently, I am finding the law that, at my willing to be doing the ideal, the evil is lying beside me.
 GROUP: Haven't heard *that* in ten seconds.
 PAUL: For I am gratified with the law of God as to the man within.
 GROUP: Uh-huh. Kind of like conceding that the law is ideal.
 PAUL: Yet I am observing a different law in my members.
 GROUP: Can you describe it?
 PAUL: Warring with the law of my mind.
 GROUP: OCD is like that.
 PAUL: Leading me into captivity to the law of Sin, which is in my members.
 GROUP: Kind of like Sin making its home in you.
 PAUL: A wretched man am I!
 GROUP: Oh, Paul!
 PAUL: What will rescue me out of this body of death?
 GROUP: Donuts! Group hug!



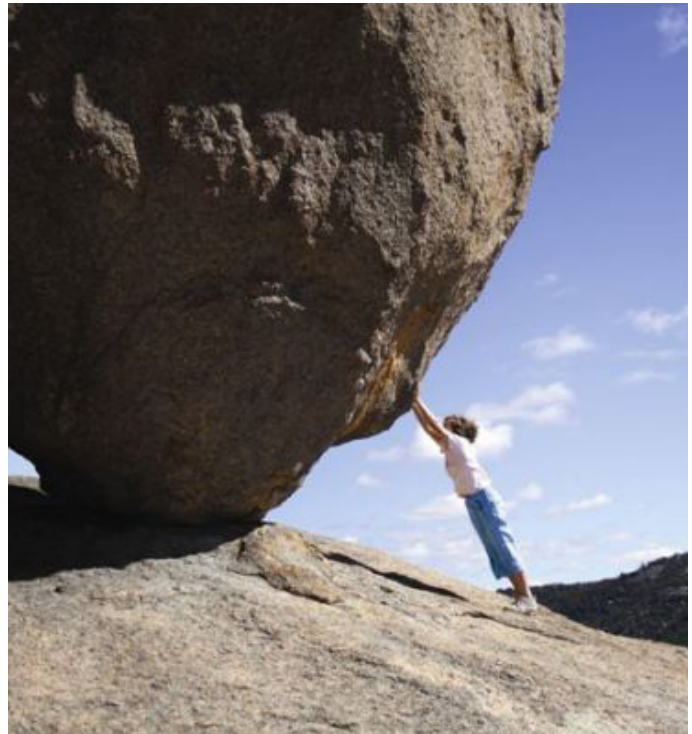
“BE LIKE PAUL”

It is hard to believe that this passage of Scripture is misemployed by Christians to inspire struggle against Sin. Some people read this passage and the message they come away with is that poor Saul lost the struggle

against Sin when he was a Pharisee, but now that he is the Bible Hero Paul, he wins the battle against his flesh every day so that now *we* should strive to be like the Bible Hero Paul and just go ahead and conquer that old flesh.

THE BATTLE IS NOT OURS

The beautiful message I bring to you today is that none of us ought to be caught up in the popular battle against Sin. This is a trap of the Adversary. You will lose his battle, and have already lost it. To continue to fight Sin it is like trying to push the Rock of Gibraltar into Morocco. How many different flavors of failure do you need dished up into your face before coming to the AA revelation—which is in fact the revelation of Romans chapter seven—that you're



doomed to lose this fight? Nothing in Romans chapter seven should suggest let alone inspire a battle against Sin, but rather an appreciation of one's inability to either cope with or fight it.

So now we look at the second step of the 12-step program, which is also a Scriptural concept:

2. *Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.*

The “power greater than ourselves” that the AA thing is afraid to say, is God. How can God restore us to sanity? By pointing us to His Son, rather than to ourselves. Want to go insane? Try to self-regulate Sin, not only the

Sin in your own life but that in the lives of others. In other words, start a Crusade. But wait. This is not the Power greater than ourselves that can restore our sanity. Jesus Christ is that Power. As we have already seen in the previous chapter of Romans and in chapter 5, Jesus Christ fought hard against Adam and won. (How is *your* war coming?) The best news I've ever read in Scripture is that Jesus Christ's victory is our victory to the extent that we are to now reckon ourselves to be dead to Sin and alive to God (Romans 6:11). Here is one time when it pays to suck the nectar from someone else's victory; no other road to victory exists. All other roads are closed.

"But Martin, how do I behave myself?" Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 1:12—

For our boasting is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and sincerity of God, not in fleshly wisdom, but in the grace of God, we behaved ourselves in the world.

We rarely see this verse. We do have a boast, but not in ourselves. Our conscience knows that were we to boast of a self-won war against the flesh, every lie detector within us would go off. The deal is that we are separated to God, *by* God ("in holiness"), because of the utter determination of God ("sincerity of God") to fix our problems. His fix is grace ("in the grace of God") and only by means of grace comes the kind of conduct pleasing to God. God would rather that we start leaning on grace and maybe drop back a few pegs in the "public image morality" department than continue relying on asceticism for a short-term "saintliness" that will eventually explode in our faces.

Paul reiterates this truth in 1 Corinthians 15:10 when he says,

Yet, in the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace, which is in me, did not come to be for naught, but more exceedingly than all of them toil I—yet not I, but the grace of God which is with me.

This is 2 Corinthians 1:12 with a twist. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would we rate Paul in the Good Behavior Department? I would give him a 9.5. (That little tiff with Barnabas costs him half a percentage point in my book.) He's a pretty good guy, right? He works harder than anyone, not only properly reflecting Christ by his conduct, but struggling to present grace to a law-loving world. How does he do it? Paul must be a rock, a fighter, a master of willpower. None of the above. "Yet in the grace of God I am what I am." Take that from the man himself. This

grace of God, when realized, does things: "His grace, which is in me, did not come to be for naught." Paul let the grace of God fuel him. To him, grace was rocket propellant. God's favor shot him to success. He knew that grace was stronger than law because he saw the effect of grace in his own life. He couldn't deny it. Did law do that? No, law ruined him. To Paul, grace was not merely the lyric of a catchy song, but the new muscle of his life. He wrote in Romans 1:16, "For not ashamed am I of the evangel, for it is God's power for salvation to everyone who is believing." *Grace is God's power.* Paul's obsession to obey commands failed him. He'd tried the way of law, only to become the wretched man of Romans chapter seven. Paul at last realized that God never designed law to control Sin, but only to highlight it. Romans 5:20—

Yet law came in by the way, that the offense should be increasing. Yet where sin increases, grace superexceeds.

The law came in to make offenses increase. What does this process look like? The law made people a) realize the just standard of God through God's announcement of it at Sinai, b) try to meet that just standard, c) fail, and d) throw up their hands while saying four-letter words and sinning like crazy out of rebellion and anger until e) they get so bogged down in their own failure and misery that they look elsewhere, anywhere, for another way. Just around this time, God sends Jesus Christ. What great timing. I wonder how God's timing can be so great. This is why, "Yet where sin increases, grace superexceeds." The above five steps are Martin Zender's 5 Step Program for Understanding How Grace Superexceeds Law. I have described it satisfactorily, I think, and with highly technical yet helpful language. May my program become the next big thing.

RETRO PAUL

Here in Romans seven, Paul assumes the place of a miserable Pharisee. He ought to know. Back then, Paul could not have realized his death to sin and law. Well? No one could have. God hadn't revealed it yet. The full purpose of the cross would not be unveiled until Paul had it unveiled to him. Instead, back in the Pharisee era, Paul wracked himself day and night trying to keep the precepts. What Paul discovered was that the law of Sin within him was much more powerful than the law's ability to combat it. It wasn't even a close contest.

I recommend Paul's revelation to everyone, but especially to those trapped in religions. Life will be much easier once the reality of helplessness sets in and the trapped people hear Jesus Christ saying, "It's already finished."

The law of God did appeal to Saul's mind, yes. Paul admits that here in Romans seven. He stared at the law throughout his life, marveling at its perfection. The perfection of the law, like a drug, stirred him to a stupendous goal that perhaps no one else had ever accomplished: he would do the law. Modern religious people get this same twinge. They call it "a desire for holiness," but I think what it really is is adrenaline, and maybe a couple of juices from the liver. This same so-called "desire for holiness" (which is really adrenaline and a couple of juices from the liver) makes people want to climb Mt. Everest and move up in the church. This is nothing more than the human lust for accomplishment, whitewashed.

As a Pharisee, Paul wanted to do right, but couldn't. Paul's daily routine was a frustrating cycle of doing ugly things that he hated and mourning beautiful things he couldn't accomplish. It is the present cause of all misery, wherever religions are named.

BUCK PASSER

Paul became so helplessly mired in sin that, at last, he blamed his misery on the Sin itself that made its home in him. I do kind of admire this passing of the buck. Paul has given buck passing a seal of legitimacy here, I think. After all, this recognition of Sin as a Giant Unconquerable Thing was perhaps the secret start of a slow realization in Paul, fingered by our Lord when He told Saul on that famous road, "It is hard for you to kick against the goads." What goads? Apparently, Saul had already sensed, way down deep inside, that something was drastically wrong with his life.

I kind of like this buck-passing thing. If it's good enough for Paul, it ought to be good enough for us. The next time you hurt someone's feelings, just say, "Oh, listen, that wasn't me; that was Sin making it's home in me." You'll be on solid Scriptural ground. The downside of this awareness is that you will have to extend the same courtesy to others: "Don't worry about what you just said to me, Bob. I know it wasn't you. I know it was that rotten Sin that's making it's home in you. Let's go get a beer."

I'm not actually promoting this. Relatively speaking, I do believe in personal responsibility. Absolutely speaking, however, God is the One responsible for everything.



Paul was a captive of Sin, and such bondage as his is the experience of everyone making the earnest yet misguided effort to wow the Deity via the same law that—wonder of wonders—was broken by every Israelite in town before Moses even got off the mountain (Exodus 32:19).

THE ANSWER: GRACE

What is the answer to Paul's cry of despair? Verses 24 and 25, "What will rescue me out of this body of death? Grace! I thank God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord."

Why is the word "grace" missing from most common translations but present in the *Concordant Literal New Testament*? The CLNT is based on the best reading of the three most ancient manuscripts: Codex Alexandrinus, Codex Vaticanus, and Codex Sinaiticus. Discovered in the mid 19th century by Constantin von Tischendorf, Codex Sinaiticus was created somewhere between 325 and 360 AD. What is unique about Sinaiticus is the presence of corrections penned into the text. These were no modern additions, but the hand of a contemporary of the original scribe.

How valuable is Sinaiticus? Only 300 years separate this document from the original manuscripts. The reason it is considered more accurate than other codices is that it "preserved superior readings" which many later manuscripts lacked. When you see the phrase "preserved superior readings" the hairs on the back of your neck ought to stand on end. This means that the corrector of Sinaiticus *may* have been looking at an earlier copy of Romans than that available to the original scribe (perhaps only two or three copies removed from the Original) or—gulp!—at the Original itself. It is the corrector of Sinaiticus who wrote "grace" into the text at the end of what would become verse 24. "Grace" is the logical answer to Paul's query. Without it, there is no direct answer in the context.

The common versions go straight from, “What will rescue me ...” to, “I thank God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.”

SWEET DELIVERANCE

There is no other deliverance possible to Paul’s (and our) dilemma besides grace. How do we know? The ex-Pharisee tried everything else. He was the test case that law doesn’t work. Saul of Tarsus had more religious zeal in his “will tank” than any human alive. It was this man who discovered that struggling against the World’s Greatest Force with an “obey or die” mindset left him as good as dead. If this prodigy of Moses couldn’t conquer Sin, none of us can. If the commandment that prohibited coveting “produced all manner of coveting” (Romans 7:8) in the self-proclaimed “Pharisee of Pharisees,” then what chance do you or I have against it?

A.E. Knoch seals this section of Romans quite sumptuously in his *Concordant Commentary on the New Testament*:

It is only as we recognize the imperial sway of Grace, putting us beyond all possibility of condemnation, whether we sin or not, that we have real liberty and power sufficient to effect not only what was demanded by the law, but those higher duties which far transcend the righteous requirements of Sinai. Then we will not be wretched and self occupied, but happy and exulting in God, in Whose favor we are basking, and Whose delight we are, in Christ.

THE WAR IS OVER

After Paul has determined “grace” to be the answer to his struggles, he ends this section in a most unusual way:

“Consequently, then, I myself, with the mind, indeed, am slaving for God’s law, yet with the flesh for Sin’s law” (Romans 7:25).

The word “consequently” is Paul saying, “Here is the result of all that I have been telling you concerning my battle against law and my realization concerning grace.” First of all: “Consequently, my flesh *still* slaves for Sin’s law.” What had changed in Paul’s flesh? Nothing. How could this be? Just wait. Secondly: “I myself, with the mind, indeed, am slaving for God’s law.” I take this to mean that Paul still acknowledged the goodness of the God-breathed mandate. Apparently, nothing has changed with Paul, either with his flesh or with his mind. But we must look deeper here because, somehow, *everything* has changed. Where is the change?

Read what Paul says immediately before his cry of, “A wretched man am I! What will rescue me out of this body of death?” Verses 22 and 23—

For I am gratified with the law of God as to the man within, yet I am observing a different law in my members, warring with the law of my mind, and leading me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

The key word here is “warring.” The cause of Paul’s anguish was the war waged daily between the intent of his mind and the inability of his body. This was the disconnect that maddened him. It was this war that made Paul a captive. Impossible wars are never won. So when the man says, “What will rescue me out of this body of death?” he refers not only to his vessel of flesh, but to that part of his humanity that desperately wanted victory over his own wicked propensities. Indeed, this was part of Paul’s flesh—his desire to please God with his amazing will. We rarely consider religious struggles to be fleshly struggles, but they are. The struggle to “do right” is as evil in the face of the cross as the conscious desire to sin. As I have often said, a slave of Sin is as much someone sinning like crazy as someone trying like crazy not to sin. Both things are of the flesh, both things are slavery, and both things lead to death.

Here it comes, then: If, at the end of this chapter, Paul is still loving God’s law with his mind but still failing it in his flesh, what has the man gotten deliverance from? *From the war against his flesh.*

The revelation of Romans chapter 7 is that grace has rescued Paul, and us, from the winless war that would forever pit our minds against our bodies. This is the struggle that will eventually kill men and women—or that will literally make them kill others ahead of their own self destruction. This is what it did to Saul—or would have done to him apart from Christ’s gracious intervention. Religious zeal always tends to death. In a flash of light brighter than the sun, Jesus Christ turned grace’s worst enemy into its most cherished friend. Saul had found a better way, and the new man, Paul, lived to tell the tale:

For in grace, through faith, are you saved, and this is not out of you; it is God’s approach present, not of works, lest anyone should be boasting (Ephesians 2:8-9).

—MZ