**The Inward Conflict: Who Is Described? (2)**

***(Examining Romans 7:7-25)***

*by Harry Osborne*

As noted in last week’s article, some have claimed that any casual reader of this context would think that Paul was speaking of his present struggle with sin in verses 14 to 25 and that only those seeking to make an argument against Calvinism would view it otherwise. Such reasoning assumes what is to be proven. As clearly shown in our last article, the careful reader should note that Paul has consistently spoken of a past time in the present tense, thus, it is reasonable to expect he is doing the same in these verses. Numerous commentators throughout history have defended the view that Paul here speaks in the present tense of a past point in time. Macknight shows the diversity of those so viewing the passage as he comments on verse 14 by saying:

"Because the apostle in this passage uses the first person, 'I am sold,' etc. Augustine in the latter part of his life, and most of the commentators after his time, with many of the moderns, especially the Calvinists, contend, that in this, and in what follows, to the end of the chapter, the apostle described his own state at the time he wrote this epistle, consequently the state of every regenerated person. But most of the ancient Greek commentators, all the Arminians, and some Calvinists, hold, that though the apostle speaks in the first person, he by no means describes his own state, but the state of an unregenerated sinner awakened, by the operation of law, to a sense of his sin and misery. And this opinion they support by observing, that in his writings the apostle often personates others. See Rom. 13:11-13. Wherefore, to determine the question, the reader must consider to which of the two characters the things written in this chapter best agree; and in particular, whether the apostle could say of himself, or of other regenerated persons, that 'they are carnal, and sold under sin.'"

The terms Paul uses to describe his thoughts and actions are the strongest reason for seeing his statements in this text as illustrating the confusion experienced by the sinner condemned through the law. Often, a close scrutiny of the words used will help us better comprehend the idea stated by the writer. For example, if one reads Galatians 6:1-5 not knowing two different Greek words are both rendered *"burdens"* in the English translation of verses 2 and 5, the reader is likely to be confused. However, when he understands that the word in verse 2 refers to a heavy load which must be shared while the word in verse 5 refers to a personal load, the meaning becomes obvious. Let us look at the terms in Romans 7:15-21 to see if we can get similar help.

Paul says, *"That which I do I know not"* (v. 15). Is he suggesting that he is not conscious of his actions? If so, his mental competence to stand accountable may be in question. Such is surely not the case with an apostle chosen by God to spread the truth and inspired to write these words by the Spirit. The word translated *"know"* is the Greek word ***ginosko*** which carries with it the significance, not just to being conscious of a fact, but of growing to understand the nature or comprehend the result of something. Whiteside commented on this word by noting:

"It does not mean simply to be conscious of the particular act one is performing, but also to grasp the nature and consequences of what one is doing. No sinner does that. When Paul was persecuting Christians, he was conscious of his acts, but was utterly ignorant of the nature and consequences of his deeds. 'Howbeit I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief' (1 Tim. 1:13). He did not know that every act he performed in persecuting the church was a crime against God and man; he thought he was doing right. He, therefore, did not know what he was doing - what he was accomplishing. When Jesus was on the cross, he prayed: 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.' These men knew they were engaged in the act of crucifying a man called Jesus; they did not know that they were crucifying the Son of God. They did not know what they doing. 'And now, brethren, I know that in ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers' (Acts 3:17). 'For had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory' (1 Cor. 2:8). Now, these men were not demented. They knew they were putting a person to death; yet they did not know what they were doing. If a sinner really knew the full nature and awful consequences of the life he is living, he would quickly turn away from it."

Three Greek words rendered *"do"* or *"practice"* in our English translations of the context also bear examination. All three words are used in verse 15 providing us an opportunity to examine their use and relation. Notice the passage:

*"For that which I do* ***(katergadzomai)*** *I know not: for not what I would, that do I practise* ***(prasso)****; but what I hate, that I do* ***(poieo)****"* [ASV].

Why are three different Greek words translated with two English words, both of which may convey the same meaning? When we define the words, we are aided in understanding the text. Let us define them:

**(1)** The Greek lexicographers Arndt and Gingrich say the Greek word ***katergadzomai*** carries the idea of achieving or accomplishing something. It does not describe a mere action, but connotes action towards an end. It could be illustrated by that which an artist ultimately "does" - not just making strokes of paint, but accomplishing the desired end of his expression.

**(2)** In contrast, the Greek word ***prasso*** describes one engaged in some action. It is mostly used of being involved in action which is not praiseworthy, thus rendered "commit" in many cases.

**(3)** The last word, ***poieo***, is used to signify the making, manufacturing or producing of something. It is used to describe the action of Aaron in producing the golden calf (Acts 7:40) and of God in creating the earth (Acts 17:24). It carries the connotation of action done to make an end product.

The sinner does not fully comprehend what he will achieve as a result of his participation in sin. Instead, the sinner merely lives for the moment, satisfying his lusts. But what happens when he has time to think about the direction of his life? At such times, he surely longs for a different life than is characterized by his action of committing sin. Yet, he keeps on doing the same thing. In the end, he hates the end product of his life being produced by his actions. In paraphrased form, that is Paul's point in verse 15. The same points are made repeatedly as Paul elaborates on this theme using the same terms throughout the text to describe the captivation of the sinner who realizes his sinfulness through the old law, but has no deliverance without Christ.

What is the solution? Paul says deliverance for such an one was found only *"through Jesus Christ our Lord"* (v. 25). What was true for the one coming to understand his sin by the old law is also true of the one today who comes to understand his sin by the new law. There is deliverance available, not by submitting to the dominion of the flesh, but by submitting to the Lordship of Jesus as an obedient servant of righteousness who has found newness of life in Christ.