

Christ: Fully Able To Save The Continually Sinful  
Romans 8

1 The Law is neither sin nor sinful

2a What the Law reveals: the sinfulness of sin

2b What the Law reveals: the sinfulness of "I"

The continually sinful "I" continually driven to a powerful Saviour

Who is the "I" of Romans 7?

Great debate has raged over the identity of the "I" in Romans 7 throughout church history. Divisions go back as far as the Greek Church Fathers who favoured reading the "I" of v14-25 as a pre-regenerate person or a pre-regenerate Paul and Augustine and Ambrose who saw Paul describing the struggle of the regenerate Christian in these verses.

Difference has continued to be fuelled by increasing attention to the nature of rhetoric in Paul's letters and in his culture milieu, as well as further understanding of the nature of tenses that plays quite a part in these verses.

The view that I am relying on in my exposition essentially breaks the passage into two and sees two different though related "I"s in verses 7-25

The "I" of 7:7-13

This first passage breaks apart mainly by virtue of the past tense which dominates the reference here. The "I" of these verses speaks as one in the past encountering the Law of God as if for the first time and through this encounter being deceived and receiving from Sin through the Law death rather than the eschatological Life which the Law promises to those who obey its command.

Firstly but most obviously I take this I to be referring to Paul in these verses although as we shall see the "I" implies a certain paradigmatic degree of with a wider group of people. Difficulty has attended Paul speaking as one who was living "once" but then "died" and taken literally seems awkward to apply to Paul. The only other option though is to take the "I" to refer to someone other than Paul and try as scholars might it is basically unsupported both in Paul and in contemporary literature. It seems best then to see these words as being softened in their context and explained mainly by the nature of the Scriptural background which Paul uses to narrate his initial encounter with the Law.

He narrates this encounter, his own personal encounter, in Scriptural terms drawn from Genesis 1-3 and especially the Fall. Here Adam meets with the command of God in a state of Life, is promised full Life through obedience to the command and threatened death if he obeys, then is deceived by sin in the guise of the serpent Satan and is dealt death for his disobedience. Paul thus describes his experience of the Law as a recapitulation of Adam's sin (obviously grounded in his relation to Adam cf 5:12-21) grounded in his own encounter of the command of God. With this in mind Paul sees his past as one radically defined by Adam both before his birth but also in his own experiences. Thus the pattern functions also paradigmatically for all the "I"s (ie us) who are likewise united to Adam and are his progeny.

The "I" of 7:14-25

Here the tense shifts rather dramatically from past tenses to present tense and seems to make a natural break with what preceded although there are obvious connections. This is the section of the passage that is the most hotly contested with many different views advocated, that the "I" is: a pre-regenerate Paul, a pre-regenerate human being, a pre-regenerate Jew or Israel, a regenerate but carnal Christian, a regenerate and normal Christian, a regenerate Christian fallen temporarily into sin.

The issue of tense has been thought by some to solve the issue but recent work on tenses in

If you are new or visiting; a special warm welcome to you. We trust you enjoy your time with us.

Today we will be having communion. If it is your practice to participate in this we welcome you to join with us in celebrating the Lord's Supper. If this is not your custom or if you are unsure of what to do please just pass the emblems (bread and wine) to the person next to you.

**This Morning**  
Speaker Nick Brennan

**This Evening**  
• JCF 5.00pm  
• Creation Evangelism 7.00pm

**Next Sunday**  
10th May. John Hannah  
17th May. Nick Brennan

**Thursday Kidz Club**  
6:30 - 8:00 pm  
7 - 12 year olds  
Ph: Allan Maguire - 4767197

**Youth Group**  
Saturday 23 May  
Meet at Wray Street - 5pm  
Moana Pool, Bring Togs  
Cost: Slide \$4.60, Swim \$1.60  
BBQ tea provided

Most of you will have noticed the new blue & yellow toddler gate that is being put up at the end of each week's service. Unfortunately some people are forgetting to close it once they go through, so our air of protecting the little ones from harm is lost. Could parents of older Sunday School aged children (the ones who go in and out the most) please encourage them to shut the gate each time it is used? Thank you.

**Prayer Items**

Jillian, Japan, would value prayer for the children from English Classes who have moved up into the middle school. All have received New Testaments. Pray that these will be put to good use and that many may be saved.

Greek suggests that although the present here definitely works to emphasise the vividness of the experience Paul speaks of it does not necessarily require a present reference (in fact there are many examples of the historic past, that is the present tense with a past reference, in the New Testament).

The view that I rely on in my exposition is that Paul here refers to the struggle of Paul as a descendant of Adam under the Law (which really connects it to the previous passage) which struggle continues in one sense unabated in the Christian's life. As an "I" passage it similarly functions in a paradigmatic and hortatory manner, Paul encouraging the Roman congregation not simply to understand his own assessment of his continuing sinfulness in Adam but also to take up this appraisal of themselves by faith and thus to daily despair of themselves and flee continually to Christ in whom there is power to save both from the guilt of sin (justification) and also the power of sin (sanctification).

There are a large number of issues to resolve in deciding this matter but those that close the deal for me are:

that although tense is not deciding the present tense does more likely refer to present experience than not, particularly as it does here follow a differently-tensed preceding passage.

that although the tense is not deciding, as all commentators agree whatever is happening here Paul is reflecting on experience, either past or present, from the present perspective of faith (ie he is either viewing his non-Christian experience by faith or his present experience by faith). But the vividness of this experience ("who will save me from this body of sin?") seems to me to point to an experience that is present now in Paul's Christian life. What would it mean if the contrary view were taken - to have a vivid, present and faith-viewed experience of a past experience that was not at the time viewed by faith? This to me seems rather difficult to hold, the major flaw being that the very nature of experience is radically shaped by the presence or absence of faith in the gospel message and what it reveals about God and about us.

That having come to this resolution of the appeal to Christ in v25a to save him from his wretched sinfulness Paul can turn and re-state the dividedness of this "I" as one who "serve[s] the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin." This seems to point to a continuing state of affairs. So much so that those proposing the view that this is Paul the non-Christian have sought often to alter the order of v25a and v25b to smoothen out the flow. As all note though there is absolutely no textual evidence for this transposition and it simply serves to demonstrate that the text sits awkwardly with this view at this point.

That the major reason which has tended to dissuade people from this view at a pastoral level, is that it seems to encourage a sort of complacency about continuing sin. The concern seems to be that if here Paul is speaking of a continuing experience which he often has, that it permits complacency towards continuing sin in the Christian life, and therefore sits oddly with other material in ch.s 6 & 8 and pastorally dangerous. This seems to me to be wrongheaded for various reasons but most of all it misses the very point of 7:14-25. Paul does not simply recount his experience for the sake of having a "getting-to-know-you" session. His personal statements in all his letters always have a rhetorical function. Here, as in Galatians 2:15-21, Paul switches into "I" mode certainly to assess himself but also to encourage the readers how they should view themselves. This is very revealing as it shows that even for Paul this is not strictly a passive experience. It is the conscious and active, by-faith assessment of his own intrinsic condition. It is active in its undertaking. And in its result it is equally active and clear. Paul personally and didactically "considers" himself in Adam, staring the fully depths of his continuing depravity in the face, not for the purpose of complacency, but as the heart of faith which stares fully at the sinners depravity and then actively flees to Christ. Here is the very heart of justification and sanctification in that the sinner sees the intrinsic continuing problem that he/she radically lacks the necessary resources to both evade the guilt of sin (justification) and the power of sin (sanctification). Thus Paul's positive instruction is that the Roman Christians, and we too, should continually take up this true and accurate picture of how we are (not just how we sometimes feel) and so flee to Christ that we should be justified in him and also progressively sanctified. This despairing of self as a conscious and believing self-judgement, which results in fleeing to Christ, is the very heart of sanctification and can no more be comfortable with sin or kept from Christ than a hungry man can be comfortable with his appetite and kept from his dinner.

## Small Groups

### **Tuesday**

- Ladies Home Group - see Laura Hannah 473-7954
- Central Home Group - see Steve Clark 479-2070
- Brockville Home Group - see Geoffrey Stewart 476-7888

### **Thursday**

- JCF Home Group - see Gideon Chang 488-2118
- Town Home Group - see Dave Smeaton 453 0569

### **Friday**

- Friday morning Home Group - see Bethney Stewart 476-7888

## Prayer Groups

### **Wednesday**

- Men's prayer group meeting at Dan and Stepha from 6:30am till around 8am.

### **Thursday**

- All Saints main church building from 5:15pm

### **Sunday**

- All Saints Hall from 9.00am

## NOTICES

- Crèche Roster  
17th May Vicki Halford, Jen Pettigrew  
14th May Hayley Smeaton, Rosie Pettigrew
- Making of Disciples Ministries Poster and fliers: Speaker: Max Vivian, Venue: Gore Christian Fellowship at 4.00pm 23 May 2009. Subject: The World's Greatest Mystery - see notice board and front table.
- Open Air Campaigners letter with notes from Ivan & Diane Grindlay and Quentin Copland - see notice board.
- 'Informer' magazine from Tom & Liz Mclvor of Word of Life Ministries, Auckland see notice board and front table.
- **Share your faith the way Jesus did. "Way of the Master" free evangelism training course.**  
Saturday May 9th & 23rd, 8:30am - 12:30pm, Morning tea provided, Cornerstone Church Hall  
Contact Quentin 0273 222 233 [qdatsun@gmail.com](mailto:qdatsun@gmail.com)