

Lenten Devotional March 21, 2023

Scripture

Romans 7:13-25

13 Did what is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, working death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.

14 For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin. 15 I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but do the very thing I hate. 16 Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. 17 But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. 18 For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. 20 Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. 21 So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. 22 For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, 23 but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin.

Devotional

The Rev. Dr. Graham D.S. Deans '06

There is no denying that Romans 7 is one of the most difficult passages in the apostle Paul's writings. Here he is revealed as "a man rent in two" (in Karl Barth's memorable phrase), wrestling with the problem of how anyone who, like himself, may be described as *creatus in imagine Dei et a Christo redemptus*, can be beset by such serious doubts as to their ultimate salvation. The reality is, however, that it is often the noblest of saints who feel their personal unworthiness the most acutely.

The passage is almost certainly autobiographical, but it doesn't refer exclusively to Paul's pre-Christian period. He faces an *ongoing* struggle, and the awful possibility of a fall from grace terrifies him (as it did the author of Heb 10:31). Even though those living in covenant loyalty and faithfulness need have no fear of their ultimate destiny, the apostle feels deeply troubled by his inability to act as he knows he ought to do (v 15). That has been a well-recognised condition; such moral perplexity is not confined to Christians, as is clear from the writings of people like Aristotle and Ovid.

Even the law (in which the apostle was an expert) is powerless (despite its inherent goodness) to save him. He knows only too well that he is but a work in progress, and only after the deepest soul-searching does he realise that the answer to humanity's moral dilemma is to be found, not in human wisdom, but uniquely through Jesus Christ.

Prayer

While we deeply regret
that all who are created in the image of God
have, by their sin, marred it;
we give thanks
that it can and will eventually be perfectly restored
uniquely through the ministry of Jesus Christ,
to whom,

with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
be all honour, glory, and praise
for ever and for evermore. Amen.