

Simply Christ

Gospel Newsletter

Sharing the simplicity that is in Christ

Paul's First Revelation

Before surrendering to Jesus Christ, the Apostle Paul was a very devout Jew who was blameless concerning the Law of Moses. He was an up and coming leader in the Jewish religion Galatians 1:14, and his great religious zeal was manifested and admired through his relentless persecution of the early believers. Philippians 3:6. It was during the height of this great sense of spirituality that Paul received his first true revelation concerning his own spiritual condition.

In the 7th chapter of Romans, Paul takes a look back at the events which convinced him of his desperate need for salvation. Addressing other believing Jews Romans 7:1, he writes, *"For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death."* Romans 7:5. The phrase *"in the flesh"* is a reference to before they were born-again of God's Spirit and attempting to serve God by the Law of Moses. He had always believed himself to be spiritual, but began to see something in his own life that challenged everything he thought was true.

Paul, who was at that time known as Saul of Tarsus, was blameless concerning the righteousness of the Law Philippians 3:6, but became

troubled in his own heart because he was doing things his own conscience condemned him for. Romans 7:15. In fact he said, *“but what I hate, that do I.”*

There is no biblical evidence, before or after coming to Christ, that Saul was ever sinful in his deeds. The struggle he mentions in Romans 7 seems to be a reference to his persecution against the early church. The Bible says he was *“breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord...”* Acts 9:1. A rage was boiling in Saul that he could not control. At some point he began to realize that what he was doing in the name of God was truly evil Romans 7:19, but still, he could not contain the hatred he felt for those who believed in Jesus Christ.

Saul was present at the trial of Stephen when the dignified elders of Israel became like wild men, gnashing upon Stephen with their teeth. Acts 7:54. He was also there when Stephen used his dying breath to ask God not to lay the sin of his murder to their charge. Acts 7:60. Stephen’s last words were filled with compassion, while the words and actions of Saul and the religious leaders overflowed with hatred and violence. The contrast between these must have troubled Saul immensely.

Everything Saul did was religiously justifiable, but it was wrong, and he knew it. Yet, he could not contain the evil that was driving him. It was only then that he began to realize that something else was actually in control. He says, ***“Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that***

dwelleth in me.” Romans 7:20. This honest assessment of his own condition would destroy every confidence of religious virtue Saul believed he possessed.

The Pharisees kept the Law perfectly and did not believe themselves to be sinners. In fact, Jesus said, *“If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin.”* John 15:22. Yet, for the first time in his life, Saul of Tarsus was forced to face the truth that he also was a slave to sin. He said, *“For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.”* Romans 7:14. This was a painful revelation for Saul of Tarsus. He had deceived himself about his spiritual condition. Now he knew he was not spiritual at all. Rather, he was carnal, a slave to sin, and he was lost.

This painful revelation brought a great cry of desperation in Saul, who wrote, *“O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”* Romans 7:24. He found this deliverance from sin when he met Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, and he spent the remainder of his life preaching that deliverance to others.

It was the bondage of sin in his own heart that stripped Saul of his false sense of spirituality and convinced him he desperately needed a savior. The modern churchgoer, however, is so programmed to believe sin is normal for a child of God, that they have no alarm when faced with the horrendous condition of their own heart. They can be bound by pornography, adultery, hatred,

greed, pride, and other such things, but are assured daily it will not matter in the day of judgment. Most are then condemned to live out their lives with a deluded sense of spirituality, and someday stand before God ...lost. Someone must be faithful to tell them, "Sin will still damn your soul, but Jesus Christ came to make you free!"