

Paul's Experience in the Conflict Between the Flesh and the Spirit.

by Thomas Reade

The sermon explores the conflict between the flesh and the Spirit, and the importance of rightly understanding Scripture, humility, and the role of the Holy Spirit in our sanctification.

Scripture: James 3:17

Topics: "Spiritual Conflict", "Biblical Interpretation"

Description

Thomas Reade preaches about Paul's experience in the conflict between the flesh and the spirit, highlighting the internal struggles and the need for self-examination and reliance on God's grace. He emphasizes the importance of interpreting Scripture correctly to avoid misunderstandings and divisions within the Christian community. Reade discusses the necessity of understanding the literal, symbolical, figurative, and comparative meanings of Bible passages to grasp the full message. He delves into the complexities of interpreting commands and statements in the Bible, urging believers to seek wisdom from above and view doctrines in the same light as the inspired writers did.

Transcript

PAUL'S EXPERIENCE IN THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE FLESH AND THE SPIRIT.

Through the remaining darkness of our minds, how many conflicting opinions divide the Christian world. Each disputant claims truth to be on his side, and is ready to anathematize all who differ from him. Many, by fanciful interpretations of Scripture, darken the Truth, and disseminate error. Others, assuming a dogmatical spirit, lord it over their brethren, as if, "They were the people, and wisdom would die with them." How different is the temper and conduct of the humble Christian. Being clothed with humility, he thinks lowly of himself, goes daily to Christ for spiritual light, reads his Bible in a prayerful spirit, and exercising charity towards others, grows in grace, is established in the Truth, and adorns the doctrine of God his Savior in all things.

As we have a natural fondness for novelty, we readily seize upon any new thought which impresses our minds, and believing it to be the true sense of our favorite passage, with Samson-like arm, we try to make all others bend to our own view of the subject. The late Mr. Cecil justly observed, "Some men get hold of an opinion, and push it so far, that it contradicts other opinions fairly deducible from Scripture." This error has been the occasion of much dissension in the Church of Christ. How greatly we need that wisdom

which is from above. It would be well, if the following excellent and important suggestion, drawn from the experience of that able minister of the New Testament, Henry Venn, was acted upon by our modern discoverers of the Truth- "To guard against dangerous perversions, it may be laid down as a maxim in divinity, that it is necessary not only to hold the doctrines of the Bible, but also to view those doctrines in the same light in which the inspired writers viewed them, and to make only the same inferences from those who they did. For there is scarcely any truth which may not be held in a partial manner, or seen through a distorting medium; so that we then only believe as the Apostles did, when we receive their tenets in the same full comprehensive meaning in which they delivered them, dwell upon them in the same proportion to other truths, and draw the same conclusions from them."

It is most important, then, rightly to explain the Word of Truth; for much diversity of sentiment arises from the different modes of interpreting Scripture. To every attentive student of the Bible it must be evident, that while numerous passages have a literal, others have a symbolical- others a figurative- and others a comparative meaning.

Thus, the declarations of Paul; "If any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his;" "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord," must be understood in their plain literal sense.

When we read, that "Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, Take, eat, this is my body," -we do not, as Protestants, understand these words in their literal, but in a symbolical sense. We do not believe that Christ actually gave his body which was then at the table with his disciples, to be eaten by them; but the natural bread and wine, which he appointed to be the symbols of his body that should be broken, and of his blood that should be poured out for the remission of sins; and "which are verily and indeed taken and received by the faithful in the Lord's Supper."

When our Lord said, "If your hand or your foot offend you, cut them off and cast them from you; If your eye offend you, pluck it out and cast it from you;" we do not receive this as a direct command, in the literal sense of the words, to cut off and cast away the various members of our bodies; but rather as a strong figurative expression, to impress upon our minds this important truth- that if sin, though dear to us as a hand, a foot, or an eye, be not cut off and cast away from us, we cannot enter into life eternal.

When to the Pharisees, Jesus said, "Honor your father and mother;" -and to the multitudes which waited on him- "If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother, he cannot be my disciple," -are we to understand our Lord as commanding us both to honor and hate our parents? While the first command is positive, and the duty of all, as Paul expresses it, "Children obey your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing unto the Lord," -the second declaration must surely be understood in a comparative sense; as if our Jesus had said, "If any one would come by faith to me, would make a profession of my name, and cleave to me for the blessings of my kingdom, he must practice such self-denial, and submit to such hardships and persecutions for my sake, as show, that he prefers me to all the dearest comforts and relations of life, such as parents, wives, children, brethren, and sisters, yes, even life itself; and must be ready to part with them, and to be separated from them at my call; as if he really hated them; and must be indeed averse to them, and to his own enjoyment of them, so far as they would hinder his faith, and love, and faithfulness to me."

John, in like manner, enforces the two following important truths, which seem at first sight to militate against each other, but when understood experimentally, they are found to be in perfect agreement. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." "Whoever is born of God does

not commit sin, for his seed remains in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." By the first, the Apostle plainly pronounces it self-deception to suppose that man can attain, in this life, to a state of sinless perfection; and this assertion he strengthens, by including himself, the beloved disciple of his Lord- "if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves." -By the second, he as plainly declares it to be contrary to the nature of a child of God to commit sin, which, to be in agreement with the truth of the former passage, must mean, to live in the allowed and habitual indulgence of any sin.

The scriptural evidence of our being born of God, and of his seed remaining in us, does not therefore consist in an absolute and entire freedom from all sin while in the body; but in our abhorrence of it, in our fighting against it, and in our not living in the habitual practice of it.

John Guyse, an eminent divine, contemporary with Watts and Doddridge, thus expresses himself in his Exposition of the New Testament; "We are not to imagine the Apostle's meaning to be, that a true Christian never sins, for this would be to make him directly contradict what he had said about deceiving ourselves, if we say that we have no sin; and about the duty of confessing our sins, which supposes us to have occasion so to do. Therefore, the words 'he cannot sin' must be understood in some such sense as this; he cannot deliberately, habitually, presumptuously, and willingly sin. The expressions in the Greek are very strong, and signify committing it, as practisers, workers, or doers of it, with freedom and choice, like people who make a trade of it; and it is the very same expression which our Lord used, when he said- 'Whoever commits sin is the servant of sin.' Our Apostle therefore says- 'He who commits sin is of the devil;' - but 'Whoever is born of God does not commit sin;' -for that principle of grace which is infused into him by means of the incorruptible seed of the Word, has an abiding root and residence in him, to rule and govern him; and he has such a thorough hatred of all iniquity, that he cannot give himself liberty to sin with deliberation and full consent as he used to do; he cannot love, and live in sin. As a child of God, and born of the Spirit, he has received a principle of grace that wills and works in direct opposition to all sin, as sin; much less can he sin upon the score of his being born of God, as though his new-birth were a license for it, or had any tendency towards it."

To an antinomian question Paul gives a Gospel answer, "Shall we sin because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid! Know you not, that to whom you yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants you are to whom you obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness." "We know," says John, "that whoever is born of God sins not; but he that is begotten of God keeps himself, and that wicked one touches him not." -For, "He that does righteousness is righteous, even as God is righteous." Nothing is so abhorrent to the renewed mind, as the workings of corruption. The pure in heart love purity, and long and pray for a constant increase of it. Their earnest desire is, that they may be sanctified wholly, in body, soul, and spirit, that all carnal affections may die in them, and that all things belonging to the Spirit, may live and grow in them. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, they are enabled to ascend higher and higher in the scale of Christian holiness; to obtain a greater victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; and to glorify God with their bodies and with their spirits which are his.

Those who are regenerated, may be termed 'perfect', as being complete in Christ, and perfectly justified through faith in his blood. They may be called perfect, when compared with the wicked, who wallow in sin, and bear the image of Satan. The advanced believer, who is matured in knowledge and experience, in grace and holiness, may be styled perfect, in comparison with young and weak Christians. Yes, even a babe in Christ, may be considered perfect, with respect to his new nature, inasmuch as he has all the parts of a Christian, though not the full development of those parts- for, being born of God, he is a child of God, and daily increases in wisdom, and spiritual stature, and in favor with God and man.

All the seeds of grace are sown in the hearts of true believers. Repentance, faith, love, obedience, patience, hope, joy, and peace are all experienced by the young convert, but, like the vegetable process, they do not shoot up into instantaneous ripeness. In some they advance slowly, in others they make more rapid growth; but in all, there is first the blade, then the ear, and then the full corn in the ear. Their graces, constantly unfolding themselves, attain to higher degrees of ripeness, until they reach the heavenly world, where only the perfection of unsullied holiness can be found. There the spirits of just men made perfect, surround the throne of God; and, having washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, they serve Him day and night in his temple.

While in the body, we must experience that conflict between the flesh and the Spirit, which marks out the true believer, from those who are the captives of Satan, and from those also who are at ease in Zion. This conflict occasions much joy or pain, in proportion to the strength or weakness of these opposing principles. The life of the Christian is a daily combat. Those people are little acquainted with it, who feel no inward struggling between nature and grace. It is true, that some pious people are less exercised than others with internal conflicts; but every view which the Scriptures give us of a life of faith is connected with exertion and opposition both from within and from without. It is called a race- a warfare- a pilgrimage. Hence believers are exhorted to run, that they may obtain the prize; to fight, that they may gain the crown; to persevere, that they may reach their promised rest. For, "as the soul of the sluggard desires and has nothing, so the soul of the diligent shall be made fat."

The Christian has been compared to a boat placed upon a rapid river, which, if it is not advancing against the current, must, of necessity, be carried down by it. To oppose the stream, would require a power not its own. Just so it is with the believer. He has to contend against a torrent of inward corruptions, known, perhaps, only to God and his own heart; and having lost, through the fall, all spiritual strength, he feels utterly unable of himself to resist them. He therefore looks continually unto Jesus, and being strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man, is enabled to stem the stream, and thus to prove that he possesses spiritual life and vigor.

Sanctification is, therefore, the gracious work of God, transforming the soul of the sinner into the likeness of Jesus Christ. Holiness is essential to our happiness; for joy springs out of that faith, which works by love, purifies the heart, and overcomes the world.

The mortification of sin is compared by Paul to crucifixion, which was a painful lingering death; "Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts." Blessed are they who can unite with the holy Apostle in his truly Christian experience, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet, not I, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

How characteristic of the church in her militant condition, is the description which Solomon has clothed in the richness of Eastern imagery- "Who is she that looks forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?" "The sun," as Leighton beautifully remarks, "is perfectly luminous, but the moon is but half enlightened; so the believer is perfectly justified, but sanctified only in part. His one half, his flesh, is dark; and as the partial illumination is the reason of so many changes in the moon, to which the sun is not subject at all; so the imperfection of a Christian's holiness, is the cause of so many waxings and wanings, and of the great inequality of his performances; whereas, in the meanwhile, his justification remains constantly like itself. This is imparted. This is inherent."

Equally characteristic of the helplessness of the Church is the interesting enquiry- "Who is this that comes up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?" Is Christ the beloved of our souls? Do we behold in him infinite beauty, grace, and power? Are we reposing our souls upon his faithfulness and truth; leaning only on the hope of his heavenly grace? Drawn by the Spirit, are we coming up from this wilderness world, a world of sin and sorrow, and journeying, through the strength of Jesus, to the paradise above?

Some people, unacquainted with the depth of human corruption, think, that to be good, is an easy attainment. The standard of goodness, which consists in amiability of temper, a freedom from grossly vicious habits, and a benevolent desire to relieve the indigent; our fallen nature may reach. A well directed education, the moral tone of the circle in which we move, and a decorous observance of the outward forms of religion, have each a tendency to civilize the mind, and to give a certain air of excellence to the character. But all this is very far below the standard of evangelical holiness.

Barnabas was called a good man, because, "he was full of the Holy Spirit and of faith." Paul, who was no flatterer, bore this testimony to the Roman Christians, "I am persuaded of you, my brethren, that you are full of goodness." On what he founded this assertion, he himself informed them, "You are the called of Jesus Christ- Your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world- Your obedience is come abroad unto all men."

How opposite is the goodness which the world admires from that which God approves. The one like the morning cloud and early dew, passes away; the other, like the rising sun, shines more and more unto the perfect day.

The love of God in Christ, a conformity to his image, a hatred of all sin, a renunciation of worldly lusts, and an entire devotedness of heart to the divine will, constitute that goodness which is pleasing unto God, and which can only spring from an union to Christ, by faith, through the power of the Holy Spirit. This happy state is attended with much conflict, arising from the remainders of sin in the regenerate. A battle must be fought, but the believer who dies fighting against sin, will die conquering, through the blood of Jesus.

The experience of eminent Christians is always interesting and instructive. All have to pass through the strait gate, and to travel along the narrow way. Many are discouraged, because they think their trials are peculiar to themselves, and such as no spiritually-minded believer can experience. Being afraid to disclose their griefs, they suffer much inward distress from the dread of self-deception and hypocrisy. Satan, taking advantage of this state of mind, strives to confirm their fears, by casting his fiery darts into their souls, and impelling them onwards to the brink of despair.

But Jesus will not allow his sheep to perish. What Satan meant for evil, he overrules for good. These trials, though severe, cut up self-righteous hopes by the root, and lead the trembling believer, under the guidance of the holy Spirit, to the foot of the cross, where peace, and strength, and victory are obtained.

They can now with freedom open their hearts to some fellow-pilgrim, and are surprised to find, that the same afflictions are accomplished in their brethren who are in the world. Thus they are comforted and encouraged to persevere.

May every Christian reader take encouragement when thus tried, for the God of all grace, who has called us, (if believers in his dear Son) unto his eternal glory by Jesus Christ, will, after we have suffered a while, establish, strengthen, settle us. To Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Paul, when he became a subject of divine grace, was made to groan under the burden of indwelling sin, which, in his unconverted state, sat but lightly on his conscience. The unregenerate, who are reveling in sinful pleasures, can form no idea of the pain which a holy mind feels, when an impure thought is presented to the imagination. Those things which the wicked dwell upon with delight, are distressing to the pure in heart. When, therefore, we hear the believer in Jesus, mourning over his corruption, and loathing himself for all his abominations, it is not because he has, in every instance, cherished iniquity, but because it is offensive in all its actings to his new-born soul. With the tried Apostle he can say- "We that are in this tabernacle, do groan, being burdened- and are willing to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord."

In the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, this spiritual conflict is described in such humiliating terms, that by some it is supposed to relate to an awakened Jew, seeking justification by the works of the Law; or, to an unconfirmed believer, struggling with feeble strength against the power of indwelling sin. They cannot conceive that Paul is relating his own experience, when, in his advanced state of Gospel sanctification, he says, "I am carnal, sold under sin."

As the design of this little work is to be experimental, and not controversial, and as the holy Apostle makes use of the first person, we will take it for granted, that he is speaking of himself, and thus endeavor to draw that benefit from his experience which we believe he intended to convey to the Christians at Rome.

Having declared, that believers are dead to the Law by the body of Christ; and that the Law, so far from subduing the evil passions, is the innocent occasion of stirring up their opposing lustings, the Apostle asks, "Is the Law sin? God forbid. No, I had not known sin, but by the Law; for I had not known lust except the Law had said, You shall not covet." Here he probably describes his earliest convictions. It was then the Tenth Commandment, reaching to the desires of the heart, which brought him to a sense of guilt and condemnation. For, he declares, "I was alive without the Law once, but when the commandment came, (perhaps the Tenth Commandment more especially, in all its spirituality and power) sin revived, and I died; and the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death."

In his unenlightened state, he was evidently working for life, instead of from life received. He was forming a righteousness of his own, grounded on his obedience to the outward letter of the Law, and which he conceived to be blameless, as he told the Philippians, when summing up his Pharisaical merits. But, when his eyes were opened to see his guilt and pollution, he found this very Law in which he trusted, and from which he expected so much reward, to be unto death, condemning him, as a breaker of it, to eternal destruction. "For sin," he adds, "taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me." O that we may learn true wisdom from this experience. Sin first deceives, and then slays the soul. Well might the Apostle warn the Hebrew converts, lest any of them should be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

How carefully does this experienced Christian guard the Church at Rome against the least idea of the Law being the cause of sin; for he immediately declares; "The Law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me; God forbid." Sin is the only cause of death. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." If Adam had never sinned, death would never have reigned over the human race. "But," says the Apostle, "sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me, by that which is good, that sin by the commandment" (contrasted with its spotless nature) "might become exceeding sinful."

It is sin then, and not the holy Law of God, which works death in the soul, and effects its ruin. The Law convinces and condemns. Sin defiles and destroys. So frightful is sin in its nature and consequences, that nothing but itself can adequately express its vileness- "that sin might become exceeding sinful." Surely none but fools would make a mock at sin, or treat with levity the awakened sinner, who is seeking deliverance from its guilt and power.

The Apostle proceeds, "For we know that the Law is spiritual; but I am carnal." Here he draws a contrast between the purity of the Law, and the carnality of his fallen nature; and when brought to this standard of perfect holiness, he perceived at once, through the light of the Spirit, of the pollution of his best action. But how strong the expression which he now uses, "sold under sin." What? the Lord's freeman, sold under sin! Could he, like Ahab, sell himself to work wickedness? Impossible.

The believer, whose experience is here described is not said to sell himself, he 'was sold' under sin. This implies something passive, rather than active. We may be said to be sold, with respect to original sin, which taints our whole nature, before we can perform one act of the will. When we have attained to the exercise of our mental faculties, and are duly awakened to a sense of our abject condition, we resemble slaves, who are longing for deliverance, and yet cannot emancipate themselves from their hated bondage. Through the remainders of corruption, we have to struggle and fight against the sin that dwells within us, and which is ever seeking to entrap us by its deceitful wiles; but, as the servants of Jesus Christ, we can never be the willing slaves of sin; this is totally adverse to the spirit of the Gospel, and marks with awful blackness the subjects of Satan's kingdom.

This seems to be the meaning of the Apostle's declaration; for he adds with much simplicity and sincerity, "For that which I do, I allow not; for what I would, that do I not, but what I hate, that do I." Thus confessing how much it distressed his renewed mind, to feel this inward struggle against the holy principle of grace. The whole bent of his mind and will was toward God and holiness; therefore, he could affirm for his own comfort, "If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the Law that it is good."

His will was averse from sin and inclined to the holy law of God; on which account he could declare without hesitation- "Now then, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwells in me." As if he said- It is not the newly implanted principle, the new man in Christ Jesus which thus labors to throw off the restraining power of the Law, but sin, the unrenewed part of my nature, which still dwells within me "For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, (my corrupt and unregenerate nature) dwells no good thing; for to will, (through the power of converting grace) is present with me, but how to perform that which is good (through the remainders of corruption) I find not."

How important is self-knowledge. "I know," says this experienced saint, "that in me dwells no good thing." This is not the language of a proud Pharisee, or of a self-righteous professor of Christianity, but of a humble believer, taught of God to know himself, to feel the plague of his own heart, and to bewail his corruptions with unfeigned sorrow.

How did the Apostle know, that in him dwelt no good thing; that is, as he himself explains it, in his flesh or unrenewed nature? Because he was constrained to acknowledge- "The good that I would do, I do not; but the evil which I would not do, that I do." He therefore places this distressing experience to the account of indwelling sin, "Now if I do that which I would not do, it, is no more I (my renewed nature) that does it, but sin that dwells in me."

At length he comes to this conclusion- "I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me." I cannot shake off this hated inmate, nevertheless, "I delight in the Law of God after the inward man." This proves that the experience here stated, is that of a truly converted person, under the teaching of the Spirit; for an unregenerate man could not delight in the Law of God after the inward man, that is, with all the powers and affections of the renewed mind. "But," he adds. "I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members." Thus while grace was urging on to higher and higher degrees of holiness, these 'Canaanites in the land' were opposing his progress, and trying to bring him into their hated captivity.

Feeling most deeply his utter helplessness under these distressing conflicts, he is compelled to cry out with doleful lamentation, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Who shall rescue me from this loathsome body of sin, which I feel so closely attached to me, and from which I cannot escape?

Job, and David, and Isaiah, and other eminent saints, have been forced to make a similar cry, when laboring under the conscious burden of indwelling sin. But, what joy, does the Gospel bring to the heavy-laden soul; what relief to the disquieted conscience! One believing glance of a crucified, exalted Savior, can drive away a legion of inbred evils, and deliver the oppressed soul from all its burdens.

The happy saint, having, by an act of faith, reached the foot of the cross, now breaks forth into an ecstasy of delight, "I thank God, who gives me the victory, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Every fresh application to the blood of the Atonement, brings fresh peace and strength to the soul, and is the sovereign antidote to the evil of sin. For the consolation of every tried believer, who has thus to endure the conflict between the flesh and the Spirit, the Apostle draws his blessed conclusion, "So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. For the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you through Christ Jesus from the power of sin that leads to death. The law of Moses could not save us, because of our sinful nature. But God put into effect a different plan to save us. He sent his own Son in a human body like ours, except that ours are sinful. God destroyed sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. He did this so that the requirement of the law would be fully accomplished for us who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit."

Happy is the believer, who, taught by the Spirit to know and to feel his own unworthiness and nothingness, goes daily, to his crucified Lord for an increase of faith and love. It is an awful deception to imagine, that because sin is never wholly destroyed while we remain in the body, that therefore we may feel easy about its dwelling within us. This is not the feeling of a child of God. Every perception, every motion, every acting of sin, however inward or unperceived by others, is painful and humbling to the new-born soul. Having received a new nature, the believer has received a new bias, new affections, and new desires. He pants after God. He longs to be conformed to the perfect image of his Savior. He delights to do the will of his heavenly Father. Though pardoned through faith in the blood of Jesus, he still loathes himself on account of his iniquity, and watches, and prays, and strives against the sin which does so easily beset him.

By the light of the Gospel Truth, he searches his heart, and takes a survey of those temptations and snares which surround his path. Ceasing from man, he trusts in the faithfulness of his Covenant God. Renouncing his own righteousness, he looks unto Jesus, and labors, through the Spirit, to follow his steps. As a person ascending a lofty mountain sees the prospect widen before him, the nearer he approaches its summit; so the true believer, as he advances in his Christian course, obtains a more expanded view of the

perfections of Jehovah, of the purity of the Law, and of the holiness of the Gospel. Hence forgetting those things which are behind him, and reaching forth unto those things which are before him, he daily pursues his upward walk, until, passing through the gates of death, he attains the summit of his desires, when, standing upon Mount Zion, with palms of victory and songs of praise, he beholds Jesus in the fullness of His glory, and is made like Him in the perfection of His holiness, when he sees Him as He is.

A consciousness of indwelling sin should therefore drive us to the cross; make us value the finished work of our Redeemer, and excite us to more fervent supplications for growth in grace- knowing that this is the will of God, even our sanctification; and, that if we ask any thing according to his will he hears us.

How great then is the privilege of the sanctified believer. He walks in the light of the Divine Countenance, and enjoys communion with God. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses him from all sin; while the Holy Spirit dwells in him, as in a temple consecrated to the Divine glory. Yet, writes John, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." O that we may come to Christ, as little children, subjecting our minds to his will and our reason to his Word. then shall we know the truth as it is in Jesus, and be governed, and guided, and sanctified by it.

Christian reader, are your feelings in unison with those of the Apostle? If you can not read your experience in this Seventh Chapter to the Romans, you have no right to the comforts of the Eighth.

When the motions of sin are felt within you, how do you act respecting them? Are they allowed to work unmolested in your heart; or, are they, when perceived, immediately resisted by the prayer of faith? Do these perceptions of inward corruption give you pain; or are they treated with indifference, so long as the inward evil does not become an outward sore? Can you say with the Apostle, "to will is present with me. I consent unto the Law that it is good; I delight in the law of God after the inward man." And, when the cry of agony- "O wretched man that I am," is extorted from you under the pressing burden of conscious corruption, does a believing view of Jesus, as your righteousness and strength, become, at once, the death of your sins, and the life of your hopes? If so, then take the full comfort of the Apostle's assurance, that to you, there is no condemnation, while you evidence your union to Christ, by walking not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

It has been quaintly, but truly remarked, that the Cross-bearer shall be the Crown-wearer. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the outward trials which they have to encounter in common with the rest of mankind, would be easily borne, were it not for the plague of their own hearts, which greatly adds to the weight of temporal affliction.

Their desire is to have their wills swallowed up in the will of God, and with filial affection to kiss the hand that smites. But alas! too often they have to mourn over a rebellious spirit, which makes sad inroads into their spirituality and peace.

Being taught of God to know themselves, and to abhor sin, they daily wrestle with this inbred evil. The weapons of all-prayer and faith in the blood of Jesus arm them for the combat. Looking unto Jesus, the Captain of their salvation, and confiding in his love, whose grace is sufficient for them, and whose strength is made perfect in their weakness, they endure unto the end, and obtain a crown of glory that fades not away.

Such are the conflicts and such the conquests of every true believer. With Paul, he can say, "Without are fightings, within are fears;" and with this holy man he can glory in tribulation. Beholding our danger and our

refuge, have we fled with anxious haste to the cross of Christ, and there, through faith, obtained the pardon of our sins, the robe of righteousness, the spirit of adoption, the renewal of our nature, the peace of God, the foretaste of heavenly bliss!

"Happy are you O Israel, who is like unto you, O people saved by the Lord. The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." "No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against you in judgment, you shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, with the Lord."

"O vain heart, where are you roving;

What proud wishes in you swell?

Can you hope for God's approving?

Are you fit with him to dwell?

Do those empty joys ensnare you

Which frail mortals prize so high?

Or do faith's bright visions bear you

To the portals of the sky?

There are times when I can cherish

Fondest hopes of heavenly rest;

Soon, too soon, they fade, they perish;

All is gloom within my breast.

O how desolate and dreary

Are those hours of lonely grief,

When the mind, depressed and weary,

Seeks, but cannot find, relief.

Gracious Lord, your righteous dealings

With our sinful race below,

Prove you faithful, though our feelings

Like the ocean, ebb and flow.

Hear my fervent supplication,

And your strength and peace restore;

Fix me on a firm foundation,
That I may be moved no more.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/thomas-reade/pauls-experience-in-the-conflict-between-the-flesh-and-the-spirit/>

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