

# The Experience of the Converted

Is Romans 7 the experience of the converted? To begin with, if one does not equate conversion with a saving relationship, salvation, I can agree with them. In other words, if your definition of a converted person is simply an individual who believes in Jesus and what He has done for sinners and wants to live a Christian life but isn't yet, then I have no argument with you. My issue is with people who equate conversion with salvation while the individual is in sin. One may be converted but at the same time have no salvation because they are sinning.

"It is not enough for us to believe that Jesus is not an impostor, and that the religion of the Bible is no cunningly devised fable. We may believe that the name of Jesus is the only name under heaven whereby man may be saved, and yet we may not through faith make Him our personal Saviour. It is not enough to believe the theory of truth. It is not enough to make a profession of faith in Christ and have our names registered on the church roll. "He that keepeth His commandments dwelleth in Him, and He in him. And hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us." "Hereby we do know that we know Him if we keep His commandments." 1 John 3:24; 2:3. This is the **genuine evidence of conversion**. Whatever our profession, it amounts to nothing unless Christ is revealed in works of righteousness." COL 312

I believe Paul's point in Romans 7 is to identify with those who have come to a knowledge of God and understand that His law is holy, just and good and want a saving relationship, but find themselves powerless to do what God asks of them. When they acknowledge their desperate need (Romans 7:24) Paul immediately moves them into the relationship found in Romans 8 that empowers them to keep God's law by His strength. Romans 7 is simply an illustration of life without the power of God intended to identify with the individual who is experiencing defeat. That is why he followed it up immediately with Romans 8 where he gives the cure to the problem. But what do we do? We get stuck in Romans 7 trying to please God in our own strength which is impossible. We are told not to worry since we believe in Jesus, His death and resurrection, and that He died for our sins and because of this, we are OK (converted). We are not led into the Romans 8 experience where we find power to keep God's commandments.

I believe the only reason we fall into sin and the Romans 7 man of sin relationship is because we take our eyes off of Jesus and like Peter, sink into sin. Our only salvation is, like Peter, to get our eyes back on Jesus, cry out for Him to get us out of sin and give us victory. We cannot get ourselves out of sin. We can only have victory and salvation as long as we are in Christ and have his Robe of righteousness covering us. "No repentance is **genuine** that does not work reformation. The righteousness of Christ is not a cloak to cover unconfessed and unforsaken sin; it is a principle of life that transforms the character and controls the conduct. Holiness is wholeness for God; it is the entire surrender of heart and life to the indwelling of the principles of heaven." DA 556

This statement makes it obvious that if we have unconfessed and unforsaken sin in our lives, Christ's robe of righteousness is not covering us, even if we are (or were) converted. We are not in a saving relationship if Christ's robe of righteousness is not covering us. It is definitely not covering the individual who is wallowing in the Romans 7 man of sin experience. Paul gave us the antidote to Romans 7 in Romans 8. Why do we almost never hear sermons on Romans 8 and 1 John 3? I can't remember when I heard one last.

Some will ask, so you never sin/fall? Yes, I do fall, but only when I take my eyes off Christ and do my will rather than His. I will never say that when my eyes are off of Christ and I'm doing my own will that I have a saving relationship and that I still have Christ's robe of righteousness covering me. The only way I can sin is to take myself out of His will and do my will, in effect, removing His robe of righteousness from myself

first. John is very clear on this fact in 1 John 3:7-9. It is impossible for someone to sin as long as the Holy Spirit (seed) is in control of him. They must first take their life out of His control before they can sin. It is all about the right action of the will. "God has given us the power of choice; it is ours to exercise. We cannot change our hearts, we cannot control our thoughts, our impulses, our affections. We cannot make ourselves pure, fit for God's service. But we can choose to serve God, we can give Him our will; then He will work in us to will and to do according to His good pleasure. **Thus our whole nature will be brought under the control of Christ.**" MH 176. It is all about surrender and allowing God to be in control. The instant we take control we are in sin and we are in a lost condition, because to take back control is an act of rebellion, sin. It doesn't matter what our condition was 30 seconds prior. We are lost and the sooner we acknowledge that, the sooner He can restore us to a saving relationship.

"There are those who have known the pardoning love of Christ and who really desire to be children of God, yet they realize that their character is imperfect, their life faulty, and they are ready to doubt whether their hearts have been renewed by the Holy Spirit. To such I would say, Do not draw back in despair. We shall often have to bow down and weep at the feet of Jesus because of our shortcomings and mistakes, but we are not to be discouraged. Even if we are overcome by the enemy, we are not cast off, not forsaken and rejected of God. No; Christ is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Said the beloved John, "These things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). And do not forget the words of Christ, "the Father himself loveth you" (John 16:27). **He desires to restore you to Himself**, to see His own purity and holiness reflected in you. And **if you will but yield yourself to Him**, He that hath begun a good work in you will carry it forward to the day of Jesus Christ. Pray more fervently; believe more fully. . . ." OFC 292, 293. So many use this statement to show that we are still in a saving relationship when in sin. This couldn't be further from the truth. Why would we need to be restored so He can continue the good work that He had begun if that work had not ceased?

If people believe that they are still in a saving relationship while sinning they will never cry out to God to give them the victory. If Peter had believed that when he took his eyes off of Jesus that there was no problem when he was sinking into the water - that sinking into the water would not jeopardize his life in any way, would he have cried out for Jesus to save him? No, Peter knew that he was not in a position of salvation when he found himself sinking and he wasted no time to repent and cry out for Jesus to save him. If we teach people that they are still in a saving relationship when they fall into the Romans 7 experience we are really telling them that there is no problem when they are sinking like Peter - their is only a problem once they are drowning or have drowned.

People will never feel any urgency to cry out to God for victory over sin if they believe they are still saved in it. The teaching that someone who is experiencing Romans 7, the man of sin is still in a saving relationship is the reason why we see so much lack of concern among God's people about sin in their lives.

We've got to stop making excuse for sin and allowing people to believe they are saved in sin. They need to feel the urgency so that the instant they find themselves falling into sin they cry out to God to save them and make it right, otherwise they will be in a lost condition. They will then make sure that they are so tight with God, so in tune with His Spirit, that they will hear Him alert them before they even begin to fall. It is God that keeps us from falling, not us. If we give Him permission to control our thoughts and feelings and keep us from sin, I can assure you He will. I have found that it is only as I remove myself from His control that I fall. The sooner people realize this the sooner Jesus can come. "The strongest temptation is no excuse for sin. No matter how severe the pressure brought to bear upon you, **sin is your own act.**" AH 331 Teachers and preachers are using Romans 7 as an excuse for sin and it must stop. "**He who has not sufficient faith in Christ to believe that he can keep him from sinning, has not the faith that will give him an entrance into the kingdom of God.**" RH, March 10, 1904 par. 26

# How to Move Out of the Romans 7 Experience

I have been asked, so you never sin? Never trip up and fall into sin? Of course I do. But I am in no way living the life depicted by the man of Romans 7.

The man of Romans 7 is powerless to keep from sinning. He says, "but how to perform that which is good I find not." Then he says, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" The man of Romans 7 has no idea how to have victory. He is clueless. So why do we equate the experience of the born-again converted walk with the man of Romans 7 since it is not the experience of the truly born-again? They know how to have victory and are not helplessly wallowing in sin as depicted in Romans 7. The born-again have been taught that they cannot keep the law in their own strength. They've been taught it is only as they surrender to the working of the Holy Spirit in their lives that they have any hope of keeping the law. They've been taught that as long as they allow the Holy Spirit to have His will in their lives that they will have victory every time. They've been taught that the only way they can fall is to take back control of their lives to do their own will instead of God's will. They've been taught that they'll never be victorious over sin in their own strength and that victory is given them by the Holy Spirit indwelling them. The victory that they have is not their own but is given to them so they have nothing to boast about. They've been taught that they can make no excuse for sin, that when they fall it is their fault because they have taken their eyes off of Christ and that they must repent if they want to be restored to the born-again victorious life. They've been taught that they are nothing without Christ living in them through the power of the Holy Spirit, and that they have nothing except it is given them. They've been taught that they are powerless, hopeless, and helpless without Christ living in them through the Holy Spirit. They've been taught that all His biddings are enablings. That they can do all things through His strength. They have been taught that as the will of man co-operates with the will of God, it becomes omnipotent. They've been taught that all true wisdom and knowledge comes from God and without Him they have none and that their very existence is totally dependent on God.

But sadly, most are not taught this and when they find themselves falling, they are referred to the man of Romans 7 as the answer, and led to believe that this is the experience of the born-again. Romans 7 is in no way the experience of the born-again. The born-again know that there is unlimited power available to keep them from sin. They know that if they fall they must make it right and get back up and be restored so they can continue to walk in the victory that is given them. If those who think and hear that they are born-again but have no clue how to have victory, like the man of Romans 7, they are not born-again.

Yes, we have an advocate, Jesus, who will plead our case when we repent. But He does not plead the case of the unrepentant. They must first repent. Here lies another error. Jesus is not pleading for us when we are in sin. He is pleading with us to repent and re-surrender so He can restore us and continue the work He has begun. I can never say that Christ's robe of righteousness is covering me when I am in known sin. I have no salvation without His robe covering me. DA 555 par 6. Matthew 22:11, 14 "All sin unrepented of and unconfessed, will remain upon the books of record. It will not be blotted out, it will not go beforehand to Judgment, to be canceled by the atoning blood of Jesus." RH, March 27, 1888 par. 12

We need to stop referencing Romans 7 as the normal experience of the born-again and find a better illustration, one where the individual when he sees his mistake, immediately repents and is restored to a victorious life. Like David when he was confronted by Nathan about his sin with Bathsheba. Or better yet Peter when he took his eyes off of Jesus and began to sink into the water and cried out to be saved. These are good illustrations of individuals who have fallen into sin or who find themselves falling into sin. Then we should encourage them to do like Joseph did who became so in-tune with the voice of the Holy Spirit that when a temptation came he saw it and didn't fall at all, but fled from it. Also, men like David, when he

was in the position to take Saul's life and was strongly tempted to do so, simply refused. These are illustrations of how the born-again respond to temptation. There are so many powerful illustrations, why do we fall for the lie of the Romans 7 experience being the born again? I can tell you why. "The new birth is a rare experience in this age of the world. This is the reason why there are so many perplexities in the churches. Many, so many, who assume the name of Christ are unsanctified and unholy. They have been baptized, but they were buried alive. Self did not die, and therefore they did not rise to newness of life in Christ" (MS 148, 1897). 6BC 1075.7. "Praying and sinning, sinning and praying, their lives are full of malice, deceit, envy, jealousy, and self-love. The prayers of this class are an abomination to God." 4T 534. What we don't know or aren't experiencing we can't teach.

I grew up living the Romans 7 experience, not knowing or being told that there was anything else available, until my mother found the truth about how to live the born-again life and shared it with me when I was in my 20s. I later studied it for myself and found it to be true. There is ample power to keep from sinning but we must avail ourselves of it. It doesn't come from within ourselves but it comes from without. It is all about surrender. Our battle is not with sin but to remain surrendered. Jesus has already won the battle over sin. If we are surrendered to Him He then deals with the sin.

After 22 years as a pastor/editor with a degree in theology and in a respected position of leadership in the church, my father discovered that he was not born-again, but living the experience of the man of Romans 7. Thankfully, even though it was a big struggle for him, he surrendered his pride and acknowledged his error. He went on to write many books on the subject of living a victorious christian life in the mid 70s and 80s. At that time they were published by the Review & Herald, but some are still available today from other publishing companies. If it wasn't that my mother and, later my dad, had discovered how to be victorious Christians and I saw the change it made, I probably would not be in the church today because I had come to the conclusion that, for me anyway, victory was impossible.

## **The Cave**

If I found myself in a cave and desperately wanted out but was unable to find my way out, and then, providentially, someone came with a map and showed me the way out, could it ever be said that even if I found myself in the cave again, that I'd be in the same predicament as I was previously? No, never!! The first time I found myself in the situation I didn't know the way out. Now I know. From now on I can never be in that position again. From now on I can only refuse to leave, which puts me in a totally different situation.

So, I hope you see that once someone finds (or is told) the way out of the condition that this Man of Romans 7 finds himself in, he can't go back to that state again. He will be there willingly. Now he can never go back to the state where he desperately wants out but has no idea how to get out. Can you see my point? The man of Romans 7 can never be used to illustrate the experience of the born-again and converted because they now know the way out.

I've spent so much time on this topic because there are some who can't or refuse to see that the man of Romans 7 is not the converted, born-again individual and cannot be. I am very concerned for them. For me, it defies logic that anyone could come to this conclusion unless they are not born-again and haven't found the way out the first time.