

Who Shall Deliver Me?

Romans 7:14-24

REVIEW

We have seen in this letter to the Romans that all humanity has sinned against God and is corrupt in thoughts, desires, values, and action; that all humanity is separated from God and will stay that way forever if not helped; and that God has helped by providing the one means whereby we can be restored to Him. This restoration is by the most gracious means imaginable. He does all the work necessary, and our part is only to believe and receive what He offers.

For all who have received this gift, there is deliverance not only from the penalty of sin, but from the power of sin NOW. This is an absolutely crucial point for the spread of this Gospel. It's the proof in the pudding. It's the evidence of what our God can DO. We may rightfully feel great pressure to see the power of God sanctify us and give us practical victory over the old ways.

Not only have we been told that victorious moral lives are achievable, but we have been told much in *how* to achieve them. We have been given the theology that explains why sin, the devil, the flesh, and the world have lost their power over us, and we are told to know, reckon on, and yield ourselves to these truths. Moreover Paul has told us of the great liberating value of seeing the exceeding sinfulness of our sin.

And then we have come to this potentially disturbing section in Romans 7, where Paul unloads and says, "To tell you the truth, though, this plan has only worked so well for me. I want to do *this*, yet I do *that*. I do what I hate, and don't do what I love!!" Oh no! You too, Paul? We did, however, observe some encouraging points last time. We saw Paul holding a high view of Scripture, transparency, humility, longing for consistency, hatred of sin, and love of that which is good.

Today, we will see cause to put this chapter in a most positive and hopeful light. You might subtitle this message, "How to be encouraged in unencouraging times." You see, the phenomenon we observe with Paul is not unusual – even among our Christian heroes. It is called vacillation. (Latin *vacillare*: "to sway" as on a ship's mast.) We don't like to see that in our leaders. We want to see consistency, steadiness, reliability.

Now to be fair, there may be a number of reasons for a leader's vacillation:

1. It may be only a perceived inconsistency.
2. It may be a change due to personal growth.
3. It may be change directed by God for reasons not known by everyone.
4. Or, yes, it may be a plain old failure. "In many things we offend all." (James 3:2) "For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not." (Ecc. 7:20)

We're just observing that Paul's struggle for consistency is not solitary or unique, but we should hasten to say, the way to rising again *is*. There are many routes to hell but one to hallelujah! Godly consistency is a common problem through the ages, and the Scriptures ultimately point to a common solution. Let's take one extended example for an illustration.

We could go to Moses, the meekest man on earth who failed for a lack of meekness.

We could go to the man of God who prophesied God's Word at the altar at Bethel then betrayed God's Word.

We could go to Jonah, whose story of despondency was different in some ways, but in others not.

But our best illustration, with much relevance to today, is the story of Elijah.

In the time of Elijah, people were not consulting their God, were falling away to false religious beliefs and practices, were becoming more ensnared in sinful behavior, and were dominated by a wicked lady and her ungodly husband for 20 years. Elijah resented the growing corruption of the age and was frustrated in his efforts to turn it around. He was burdened and vexed and finally discouraged to the point of wanting to die. We will look at why he was discouraged and at God's counsel on how to be encouraged.

I. A verse-by verse review of the story in I Kings 19:1-18

II. Lessons about discouragement

A. Man can be discouraged in spite of any good thing that happens.

1. That's the original mystery here—how a man could participate in one of the great supernatural victories in history... and be depressed the same day.
2. But even a day can be long, and it can be hard to hold on to the end.
3. Especially given that we are full of contradictions. Look at Elijah: He flees for his life and then pleads for death! The champion of the morning becomes the coward of the evening. Truly, Elijah was a man subject to like passions as are we (James 5:17).

Chaos of passions, passions all confused,
Still by himself abused or disabused,
Inclined half to rise and half to fall,
Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all:
Sole judge of truth, in endless error hurled,
The glory, jest, and riddle of the world.

B. Man can be discouraged by the condition of others.

1. Clearly Elijah was offended with the apathy of others. You would have thought *this* would have stirred them, he thinks. But no! He's angry very much as was Moses, who smote the rock twice. Wasn't *anybody else* on fire for God?!
2. A contemporary application: the new Barna study on America's addiction to immorality. Attitudes toward illicit materials are shifting. Such materials are now thought neutral or good for society. One in 20 young adults see immoral materials as bad. Not recycling is viewed as more immoral.
3. We look at our upcoming presidential elections. On one side we have an apparently dishonest serial law-breaker who supports unnatural lifestyles and the slaying of the unborn versus an avowed socialist who "does not believe in God in the traditional sense." And on the other side, the popular leader appears to be a vulgar, bloviating, self-absorbed, unrighteous, and ungodly man.
4. We look at our government funding of an organization that slays unborn children and sells their body parts, while those who uncovered this travesty are the ones being indicted!
5. Oh, how a person can be discouraged by the spiritual condition of others!

C. Man can be discouraged by his own condition.

1. Part of Elijah's trouble may be physical and emotional exhaustion. Think, too, what loneliness can do. No one comes to his aid or gave encouragement.
2. Part can be self-loathing. Elijah was a coward and he knew it. He was a hypocrite, not trusting God to the end. He didn't fear 450 priests or a thousand dry days, but he did fear one woman.

3. Part can be spiritual oppression.
4. Part can be the pained side of spiritual growth.
5. Part can be the consequence of self-deception and ignorance, which leads us to our last point ...

D. Man can be discouraged because he doesn't have God's perspective.

1. Elijah thinks God should be acting differently (be more quick to vindicate Himself).
2. He sees himself as irreplaceable.
3. He thinks he understands what should move people to action.

III. Lessons about Encouragement

A. God gives a lesson starting with a repeated question: "What doest thou here, Elijah?" (:9, :13)

1. This is very similar to His dialogue with Jonah 40 years later.
2. This is very similar to David's question to himself: "Why art thou cast down, o my soul, and...?"
3. This is very similar also to the Lord's thrice-asked question to Peter, "Do you love me?"
4. Perhaps it is very similar to questions the Lord has asked ... us?

B. The lesson continues with an object lesson.

1. This is almost a carbon copy of what happened to Moses (the giver of the law vs. Elijah, the restorer to the law). Same place. Both receive special revelations after a faithful witness against idolatry and a slaughter of idolaters.
2. David also had a similar experience: See, for ex., Ps. 18:4-15.
3. The message: God has power to give phenomenal signs, but God is not "in" them. No display, no matter how fancy, guarantees winning hearts for God. Look at the Exodus. Look at the life of Christ. Look at Abraham's comments to the rich man in hell.
4. This is a major message to Elijah because fire and power were his strong suits, his M.O.
5. But judgment and destruction are God's "strange work." And the law is not an end in itself. No, the gentle voice, the loving voice of the Gospel follows the law. Their hearts have to be gripped, Elijah, and that takes more than fireworks.
6. Paul did not ask "WHAT shall save me from the body of this death?" but ... "WHO."
7. That's the common solution for all. That's how we can have encouragement and victory any time. That's how we can move toward a more and more consistent life of victory. So for Elijah, Moses, the man of God, Jonah, Peter, Paul, us.
8. "By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil." (Prov. 16:6)

"To be little with God is to be little for God. To be much with God is to be much for God."

