

YOU MUST LIVE WITH YOURSELF

"O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from me from the body of this death" (Romans 7:24).

Man has always found it easier to conquer his environment than himself. Today the conquest of outer space is proving a much easier venture than to conquer the inner space of ideas, emotions, and attitudes. It is also much easier than it is to advance in the proper human relationships.

While we open space to our penetration, we also project into it fears, bitterness, and hate. While victories in space are spectacular, defeat and failure mount up within the inner space of our lives. Delinquency, abnormal behavior, broken homes, nervous breakdowns, and war continue to be unpleasant features of our age.

The turmoil, the conflicts, and the failures of inner space have never been expressed better than Paul described them in Romans seven. Paul called himself a wretched man because he was finding himself a puzzling and difficult man with whom to live. He was quite sincere. Dwight L. Moody expressed it in another way when he said, "I have had more trouble with myself than with any other man I have ever met." Earlier in this chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, Paul wrote: "I cannot understand my own actions; I do not act as I want to act; on the contrary, I do what I detest." Then he continues with a severe analysis of himself. "I cannot be good as I desire to be, and I do wrong against my wishes ... Miserable wretch that I am! Who will rescue me?" (Romans 7:19, 24, Moffat).

Paul had encountered himself. Have you ever walked down a hall of mirrors in some amusement park and bumped into yourself. The prodigal Son was said to have come to himself in the far country. That was not an isolated experience. He was doing that repeatedly.

Paul meant what he said. When we say similar things, disparaging things concerning ourselves, we do not always mean it. Occasionally Christians call themselves "miserable sinners" --but you had better not call them that. However we feel about ourselves, there is no escape. When Lord Byron was exiled from England he wrote, "What exile from himself can flee?" A man can run away from home, escape from his social circle, from his earlier beliefs, and from almost anything under heaven, except himself.

For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, and with the certainty that death will not you part, you live with yourself. It may be a self that you enjoy living with; it may be one that you deplore, and yet must endure. The resolute grappling of a man with his own life is one of the most searching tests of character, for most people are willing to grapple with anything else under heaven, rather than to face squarely their individual responsibility for their own lives.

Our text is a profound, and yet a very simple one. It is a mirror in which universal human experience is reflected. It is the story of every life. People have a dual personality, so to speak, -- on one side it is good and on the other it is bad. That accounts for the popular axiom, "There is some good in the worst of us, and some bad in the best of us." Nothing is more obvious to the careful student of life. The man who can kill in cold blood in his gangsterism may be extremely fond of children and may contribute generously to an orphanage. The man who is the leading philanthropist may at the same time be living in immorality.

Paul was extremely conscious of this duel between good and evil in human nature,

according to his own self-diagnosis: "For the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me." Good and evil are present and active within each of us.

Our Scripture gives the striking story of a continual conflict: "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man; but 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." Paul is talking here about a saved man. No unsaved man delights in the law of God. His is the mind of the flesh, and it is enmity against God. He describes the battle against evil fought by a soul which has been enlightened by the law of God and renewed by the Spirit of God. Paul is describing the conflict he has known in fighting against the evil tendencies and appetites which continue to strive for mastery over the soul even of a Christian. What Christian has not known this conflict between the old man of the flesh and the new man of the Spirit?

The struggle of a saved man is different from that of an unsaved man. The saved man is a sinner with a Saviour. The unsaved man is a sinner without a Saviour. The sinner's conflict is between his lower and his higher self. He cannot hope for ultimate conquest, because he does not have any higher help than self. The saved man's conflict is between his natural self and his spiritual self. He can hope for ultimate conquest, because he has a Helper higher than self. He can confidently hope for conquest in Jesus Christ his Lord. What a difference there is between a battle without hope and a battle with hope! How much stronger for the conflict is the man with hope!

Only as and when one sees the possibility of victory does he attempt to win it. We must begin with an idea, a dream, or a vision if we are to conquer. So many of us are being defeated in our moral struggles and overwhelmed by the tempter because we have not had a vision of what we may yet be. We have become conditioned by our former weaknesses and conflicts to expect nothing better. Until we see what we may be we shall not strive to be the persons we may become. We have our weaknesses, but we accept them. We know the limitations of our abilities, but we have made our peace with them. Our sins have made our Christian lives unsatisfactory to ourselves, unattractive to others, and displeasing to God.

Our trouble is that the picture we have accepted of ourselves is not good enough. We could be better and do better. Our need is to catch a vision of goals far beyond our achievements. Our lives will never advance unless our vision goes ahead of us.

Conquest of the inner self is dependent on the discovery of power. The forces opposed to us are great; our need is to find a greater power that will enable us to win the victory. Many of us have had visions of what we may be, but we have never been able to achieve it. We understand what Paul meant when he wrote, "I desire to do right but wrong is all that I can manage" (Moffat).

Recognize that evil is present in you and around you. Remember that you will never completely destroy it. Turn to Christ in complete dedication and let Him give you the power to master the evil forces within and around you. Christ is able to release into your life the power that will make conquest possible.

Let us look at this question, "Who shall deliver me?" You yourself must play a part in the liberation. The first step toward the achievement of a self worth living with lies in obeying the injunction of Scorates, which is inscribed in marble over the Delphic temple: "Know thyself." It still contains much wisdom, and yet it is not any simple matter. Richard Baxter said that he was seven years studying himself and trying to get acquainted with his own heart. What a vast and complicated subject self is. How many there are who cannot for the life of them figure out what they were meant to be and to do. But this can be done. This knowledge of self can be obtained.

We need to make the insight of Shakespeare our own. He said, "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings." That is why Shakespeare remains master of all the dramatists. He shifts the battlefields to the souls of men. Hamlet wrestles with his own hesitant, shocked, indecisive soul; Macbeth with his own ambition and remorse; Othello with his insatiable jealousy. So one great thing an individual can do is to make himself responsible for himself.

No good life has ever been lived which did not face itself and win the victory. Who shall deliver you? Yourself! And self-knowledge will enable you to reshape your personality by helping you to face your own faults and problems of personal conduct honestly.

To live with yourself, to find yourself good company, you must properly furnish your mind. There is no excuse for a man living in ignorance. Never was knowledge so accessible. Why is study valuable? Because new interests and objectives call forth in the personality hitherto unsuspected and undetected powers. All that some people need is something new to think about, and something new to strive and work for.

In one of his fables, Aesop tells of a sparrow that saw a farmer sowing hemp seed in his field. The sparrow called together the other birds and reminded them that hemp was the material out of which nets, in which birds were caught, were made. He advised them to eat the seeds which were being sown so that the hemp would never grow. But the birds were too busy having a good time to pay any attention to the wise old sparrow.

In a while the hemp seeds sprouted and appeared above the ground. Again the sparrow begged them to pull up the plants before they grew any larger. But they paid no heed to the good advice. Then the old sparrow became discouraged and flew off to a city to live. One day he saw a birdcatcher coming down the street. On his shoulder was a cage and in it were many of his former companions. They had been caught in a new made from the hemp they had neglected to uproot.

When we get into trouble it is usually, as it was with the birds, because we have neglected something we should have done.

"Neglect" means not to gather up. It makes up think of a blind man walking through a valley where the ground is covered with diamonds and not gathering any of them. God has put the wonders of His love and grace all around us, and there are some of us who are walking through life, like the blind man through the valley of treasure, and coming to the end of it as poor, in the riches of God's love and grace, as when we started because of our own neglect.

Do you want to be delivered from the service of sin which is associated with the body? Are you sick of the old self of sin, the self that continually dogs the steps and hurts the life? If so, there is victory for you through Christ. You can triumph through Him.

We live with ourselves most satisfactorily when we attune our spirits to the Master's Spirit. Now hear Paul's question and the answer of a victorious self. Let Dr. Moffat capture for our English speech the thrill of it: "Miserable wretch that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? God will! Thanks be to him through Jesus Christ our Lord!" What will the result be? Not conceit, but true humility. If you have any insight, or talent, or ability, is it not a gift? And you have at least one talent.

Humility is not self-despising, nor is it condescending. God wants you to honor yourself. When Cecil Rhodes was a young man of twenty-two, he made a will leaving a fortune for what is known as the Rhodes Scholarship. He was a poor man then, but he set out to earn the money for his dream. He found diamonds. When he was about to pass away he called for the will, which he had written and signed in his youth, and said, "I signed it, and I have fulfilled it."

There is a great power available to you for living as you should live. We can never have it without a personal surrender to Christ. That power will flow into you as you surrender your life to Christ. Through His life and death and resurrection you can discover a new force for living. "Who shall deliver me?" The Lord Jesus Christ will deliver you from your wretchedness, but no one else can do so. Receive Christ as your Saviour and surrender to Him as your Lord and He will give you the victory.