

## **CHRISTIAN PERFECTION? (Part-one of a four-part study)**

One of the most bewildering doctrines within the Evangelical community is the teaching of entire sanctification. It implies that a Christian can reach a condition of sinless perfection during the course of their earthly life. One of the weaknesses of this perspective consists of the many caveats that are offered in order to harmonize this teaching with the reality of sin in every believer's life. More importantly, the New Testament as a whole does not support the notion of entire sanctification in this life. One passage in particular which stands out as a refutation of this doctrine, is authored by the apostle Paul and found in Romans 7:7-25.

Romans 7:7-13 describes the personal experience of Saul the Pharisee prior to his conversion. The **past** tense is used to convey his conviction of sin, specifically that of covetousness. In v8, he states that sin "taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind." He describes the resulting impact of that conviction of sin as having "died" (v9), and being "deceived" and "killed" (v11). Paul reveals here that his profound experience under the conviction of sin was a critical aspect of his eventually coming to Christ (Acts 26:14).

However, the past tense is completely abandoned by Paul in Romans 7:14-25, as the apostle vividly details his ongoing struggle with sin. Virtually every verse in this highly candid narrative confirms a **present** tense emphasis. In order to highlight a few instances that make his ongoing struggle with sin unmistakably clear, consider Romans 7:15, 19, and 24 –

**"For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate."**

**"For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want."**

**"Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?"**

Does Paul affirm some condition of sinless perfection in v24 by stating: "wretched man that I used to be?" Of course not! His present tense struggle with sin made him feel wretched, rather than perfect. To whom does he look for victory in his ongoing struggle with sin? The answer is given in Romans 7:25 –

**"Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin."**

In all the above, there is no portrayal of achieving a permanent, comprehensive victory over sin, as long as Paul remained in "the body of this death." (v24b)