

Legal Experience

by Charles Finney

The 7th chapter of Romans describes the experience of a sinner under conviction, not a Christian experience.

Scripture: Romans 7:14

Topics: "Understanding Salvation", "The Role of the Law"

Description

Charles Finney explores Romans chapter 7, emphasizing the distinction between the experiences of a sinner under conviction and a true Christian. He critiques the common interpretation that this chapter reflects a Christian's struggle with sin, arguing instead that it describes the legal experience of a sinner who recognizes the law but remains unconverted. Finney stresses the importance of understanding this passage correctly, as misinterpretation can lead individuals to falsely believe they are saved when they are not. He concludes that true conversion results in a change of heart and a genuine desire to serve God, contrasting this with the mere desires of the unconverted.

Transcript

TEXT.--The 7th chapter of Romans.

I HAVE more than once had occasion to refer to this chapter, and have read some portions of it and made remarks. But I have not been able to go into a consideration of it so fully as I wished, and therefore thought I would make it the subject of a separate lecture. In giving my views I shall pursue the following order:

- I. Mention the different opinions that have prevailed in the church concerning this passage.
- II. Show the importance of understanding this portion of scripture aright, or of knowing which of these prevailing opinions is the true one.
- III. Lay down several facts and principles which have a bearing on the exposition of this passage.
- IV. Refer to some rules of interpretation which ought always to be observed in interpreting either the scriptures or any other writing or testimony.
- V. Give my own views of the real meaning of the passage, with the reasons.

I shall confine myself chiefly to the latter part of the chapter, as that has been chiefly the subject of dispute. You see from the manner in which I have laid out my work, that I design to simplify the subject as

much as possible, so as to bring it within the compass of a single lecture. Otherwise I might make a volume; as much has been written to show the meaning of this chapter.

I. I am to show what are the principal opinions that have prevailed concerning the application of this chapter.

1. One opinion that has extensively prevailed and still prevails, is that the latter part of the chapter is an epitome of Christian experience.

It has been supposed to describe the situation and exercises of a Christian, and designed to exhibit the Christian warfare with indwelling sin. It is to be observed, however, that this is, comparatively, a modern opinion. No writer is known to have held this view of the chapter, for centuries after it was written. According to Professor Stuart, who has examined the subject more thoroughly than any other man in this country, Augustine was the first writer that exhibited this interpretation, and he resorted to it in his controversy with Pelagius.

2. The only other interpretation given is that which prevailed in the first centuries, and which is still generally adopted on the continent of Europe as well as by a considerable number of writers in England and in this country; that this passage describes the experience of a sinner under conviction, who was acting under the motives of the law, and not yet brought to the experience of the gospel. In this country, the most prevalent opinion is, that the 7th of Romans delineates the experience of a Christian.

II. I am to show the importance of a right understanding of this passage.

A right understanding of this passage must be fundamental. If this passage in fact describes a sinner under conviction, or a purely legal experience, and if a person supposing that it is a Christian experience finds his own experience to correspond with it, his mistake is a fatal one. It must be a fatal error, to rest in his experience as that of a real Christian, because it corresponds with the 7th of Romans, if Paul is in fact giving only the experience of a sinner under legal motives and considerations.

III. I will lay down some principles and facts, that have a bearing on the elucidation of this subject.

1. It is true, that mankind act, in all cases, and from the nature of mind must always act, as on the whole they feel to be preferable.

Or, in other words, the will governs the conduct. Men never act against their will. The will governs the motion of the limbs. Voluntary beings cannot act contrary to their will.

2. Men often desire what, on the whole, they do not choose.

The desires and the will are often opposed to each other. The conduct is governed by the choice, not by the desires. The desires may be inconsistent with the choice. You may desire to go to some other place to-night, and yet on the whole choose to remain here. Perhaps you desire very strongly to be somewhere else, and yet choose to remain in meeting. A man wishes to go a journey to some place. Perhaps he desires it strongly. It may be very important to his business or his ambition. But his family are sick, or some other object requires him to be at home, and on the whole he chooses to remain. In all cases, the conduct follows the actual choice.

3. Regeneration, or conversion, is a change in the choice.

It is a change in the supreme controlling choice of the mind. The regenerated or converted person prefers God's glory to every thing else. He chooses it as the supreme object of affection. This is a change of heart. Before, he chose his own interest or happiness, as his supreme end. Now, he chooses God's service in preference to his own interest. When a person is truly born again, his choice is habitually right, and of course his conduct is in the main right.

The force of temptation may produce an occasional wrong choice, or even a succession of wrong choices, but his habitual course of action is right. The will, or choice, of a converted person is habitually right, and of course his conduct is so. If this is not true, I ask, in what does the converted differ from the unconverted person? If it is not the character of the converted person, that he habitually does the commandments of God, what is his character? But I presume this position will not be disputed by any one who believes in the doctrine of regeneration.

4. Moral agents are so constituted, that they naturally and necessarily approve of what is right.

A moral agent is one who possesses understanding, will, and conscience. Conscience is the power of discerning the difference of moral objects. It will not be disputed that a moral agent can be led to see the difference between right and wrong, so that his moral nature shall approve of what is right. Otherwise, a sinner never can be brought under conviction. If he has not a moral nature, that can see and highly approve the law of God, and justify the penalty, he cannot be convicted. For this is conviction, to see the goodness of the law that he has broken and the justice of the penalty he has incurred. But in fact, there is not a moral agent, in heaven, earth, or hell, that cannot be made to see that the law of God is right, and whose conscience does not approve the law.

5. Men may not only approve the law, as right, but they may often, when it is viewed abstractly and without reference to its bearing on themselves, take real pleasure in contemplating on it.

This is one great source of self-deception. Men view the law of God in the abstract, and love it. When no selfish reason is present for opposing it, they take pleasure in viewing it. They approve of what is right, and condemn wickedness, in the abstract. All men do this, when no selfish reason is pressing on them. Who ever found a man so wicked, that he approved of evil in the abstract? Where was a moral being ever found that approved the character of the devil, or that approved of other wicked men, unconnected with himself? How often do you hear wicked men express the greatest abhorrence and detestation of enormous wickedness in others. If their passions are in no way enlisted in favor of error or of wrong, men always stand up for what is right. And this merely constitutional approbation of what is right may amount even to delight, when they do not see the relations of right interfering in any manner with their own selfishness.

6. In this constitutional approbation of truth and the law of God, and the delight which naturally arises from it, there is no virtue.

It is only what belongs to man's moral nature. It arises naturally from the constitution of the mind. Mind is constitutionally capable of seeing the beauty of virtue. And so far from their being any virtue in it, it is in fact only a clearer proof of the strength of their depravity, that when they know the right, and see its excellence, they do not obey it. It is not then that impenitent sinners have in them something that is holy. But their wickedness is herein seen to be so much the greater. For the wickedness of sin is in proportion to the light that is enjoyed. And when we find that men may not only see the excellence of the law of God, but even strongly approve of it and take delight in it, and yet not obey it, it shows how desperately wicked they

are, and makes sin appear exceeding sinful.

7. It is a common use of language for persons to say, "I would do so and so, but cannot," when they only mean to be understood as desiring it, but not as actually choosing to do it. And so to say, "I could not do so," when they only mean that they would not do it, and, they could if they would.

Not long since, I asked a minister to preach for me next Sabbath. He answered, "I can't." I found out afterwards that he could if he would. I asked a merchant to take a certain price for a piece of goods. He said, "I can't do it." What did he mean? That he had not power to accept of such a price? Not at all. He could if he would, but he did not choose to do it. You will see the bearing of these remarks, when I come to read the chapter. I proceed, now,

IV. To give several rules of interpretation, that are applicable to the interpretation not only of the Bible, but of all written instruments, and to all evidence whatever.

There are certain rules of evidence, which all men are bound to apply, in ascertaining the meaning of instruments and the testimony of witnesses, and of all writings.

1. We are always to put that construction on language which is required by the nature of the subject.

We are bound always to understand a person's language as it is applicable to the subject of discourse. Much of the language of common life may be tortured into any thing, if you lose sight of the subject, and take the liberty to interpret it without reference to what they are speaking of. How much injury has been done, by interpreting separate passages and single expressions in the scriptures, in violation of this principle. It is chiefly by overlooking this simple rule, that the scriptures have been tortured into the support of errors and contradictions innumerable and absurd beyond all calculation. This rule is applicable to all statements. Courts of justice never would allow such perversions as have been committed upon the Bible.

2. If a person's language will admit, we are bound always to construe it so as to make him consistent with himself.

Unless you observe this rule, you can scarcely converse five minutes with any individual on any subject and not make him contradict himself. If you do not hold to this rule, how can one man ever communicate his ideas so that another man will understand him? How can a witness ever make known the facts to the jury, if his language is to be tortured at pleasure, without the restraints of this rule?

3. In interpreting a person's language, we are always to keep in view the point to which he is speaking.

We are to understand the scope of his argument, the object he has in view, and the point to which he is speaking. Otherwise we shall of course not understand his language. Suppose I were to take up a book, any book, and not keep my eye on the object the writer had in view in making it, and the point to which he is aiming, I never can understand that book. It is easy to see how endless errors have grown out of a practice of interpreting the scriptures in disregard of the first principles of interpretation.

4. When you understand the point to which a person is speaking, you are to understand him as speaking to that point; and not to put a construction on his language unconnected with his object, or inconsistent with it.

By losing sight of this rule, you may make nonsense of everything. You are bound always to interpret language in the light of the subject to which it is applied, or about which it is spoken.

V. Having laid down these rules and principles I proceed in the light of them to give my own view of the meaning of the passage, with the reasons for it. But first I will make a remark or two.

1st. REMARK. Whether the apostle was speaking of himself in this passage, or whether he is supposing a case, is not material to the right interpretation of the language.

It is supposed by many, that because he speaks in the first person, he is to be understood as referring to himself. But it is a common practise, when we are discussing general principles, or arguing a point, to suppose a case by way of illustration, or to establish a point. And it is very natural to state it in the first person, without at all intending to be understood, and in fact without ever being understood, as declaring an actual occurrence, or an experience of our own. The apostle Paul was here pursuing a close train of argument, and he introduces this simply by way of illustration. And it is no way material whether it is his own actual experience, or a case supposed.

If he is speaking of himself, or if he is speaking of another person, or if he is supposing a case, he does it with a design to show a general principle of conduct, and that all persons under like circumstances would do the same. Whether he is speaking of a Christian, or of an impenitent sinner, he lays down a general principle.

The apostle James, in the 3d chapter, speaks in the first person; even in administering reproof. "My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. For in many things we offend all."

"Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God."

The apostle Paul often says "I," and uses the first person, when discussing and illustrating general principles: "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any:" And again, "Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other: for why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience? For if I by grace be a partaker, why am I evil spoken of for that for which I give thanks? For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." So also, "For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor." In 1st Corinthians iv. 6. he explains exactly how he uses illustrations, "And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself, and to Apollos, for your sakes: that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another."

2nd. REMARK. Much of the language which the apostle uses here, is applicable to the case of a backslider, who has lost all but the form of religion. He has left his first love, and has in fact fallen under the influence of legal motives, of hope and fear, just like an impenitent sinner. If there be such a character as a real backslider, who has been a real convert, he is then actuated by the same motives as the sinner, and the same language may be equally applicable to both. And therefore the fact that some of the language before us is applicable to a Christian who has become a backslider, does not prove at all that the experience here described is Christian experience, but only that a backslider and a sinner are in many

respects alike. I do not hesitate to say this much, at least; that no one who was conscious that he was actuated by love to God could ever have thought of applying this chapter to himself. If any one is not in the exercise of love to God, this describes his character; and whether he is backslider or sinner, it is all the same thing.

3rd. REMARK. Some of the expressions here used by the apostle are supposed to describe the case of a believer who is not a habitual backslider, but who is overcome by temptation and passion for a time, and speaks of himself as if he were all wrong. A man is tempted, we are told, when he is drawn away by his own lusts, and enticed. And in that state, no doubt, he might find expressions here that would describe his own experience, while under such influence. But that proves nothing in regard to the design of the passage, for while he is in this state, he is so far under a certain influence, and the impenitent sinner is all the time under just such influence. The same language, therefore, may be applicable to both, without inconsistency.

But although some expressions may bear this plausible construction, yet a view of the whole passage makes it evident that it cannot be a delineation of Christian experience. My own opinion therefore is, that the apostle designed here to represent the experience of a sinner, not careless, but strongly convicted and yet not converted. The reasons are these:

1. Because the apostle is here manifestly describing the habitual character of some one; and this one who is wholly under the dominion of the flesh. It is not as a whole a description of one who, under the power of present temptation, is acting inconsistently with his general character, but his general character is so. It is one who uniformly falls into sin, notwithstanding his approval of the law.

2. It would have been entirely irrelevant to his purpose, to state the experience of a Christian as an illustration of his argument. That was not what was needed. He was laboring to vindicate the law of God, in its influence on a carnal mind. In a previous chapter he had stated the fact, that justification was only by faith, and not by works of law. In this seventh chapter, he maintains not only that justification is by faith, but also that sanctification is only by faith. "Know ye not brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? So then, if while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man." What is the use of all this? Why, this, "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God." While you were under the law you were bound to obey the law, and hold to the terms of the law for justification. But now being made free from the law, as a rule of judgment, you are no longer influenced by legal considerations, of hope and fear, for Christ to whom you are married, has set aside the penalty, that by faith ye might be justified before God.

"For when we were in the flesh," that is, in an unconverted state, "the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death: But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter." Here he is stating the real condition of a Christian, that he serves in newness of spirit and not in the oldness of the letter. He had found that the fruit of the law was only death, and by the gospel he had been brought into true subjection to Christ. What is the objection to this? "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. And the commandment which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death."

The law was enacted that people might live by it, if they would perfectly obey it; but when we were in the flesh, we found it unto death. "For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me. Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." Now he brings up the objection again. How can any thing that is good be made death unto you?--"Was, then, that which is good made death unto me?--God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might be exceedingly sinful." And he vindicates the law, by showing that it is not the fault of the law, but the fault of sin, and that this very result shows at once the excellence of the law and the exceeding sinfulness of sin. Sin must be a horrible thing, if it can work such a perversion, as to take the good law of God and make it the means of death.

"For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin." Here is the hinge, on which the whole questions turns. Now mark; the apostle is here vindicating the law against the objection, that if the law is the means of death to sinners, it cannot be good. Against this objection, he goes on to show, that all its action on the mind of the sinner proves it to be good. Keeping his eye on this point, he argues, that the law is good, and that the evil comes from the motions of sin in our members. Now he comes to that part which is supposed to delineate a Christian experience, and which is the subject of controversy. He begins by saying, "the law is spiritual but I am carnal." This word carnal he uses once and only once, in reference to Christians, and then it was in reference to persons who were in a very low state in religion. "For ye are yet carnal; for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men." These Christians had backslidden, and acted as if they were not converted persons, but were carnal. The term itself is generally used to signify the worst of sinners. Paul here defines it so; "carnal, sold under sin." Could that be said of Paul himself, at the time he wrote this epistle? Was that his own experience? Was he sold under sin?" Was that true of the great apostle? No, but he was vindicating the law, and he uses an illustration, by supposing a case. He goes on, "For that which I do, I allow not; for what I would, that I do not; but what I hate, that do I."

Here you see the application of the principles I have laid down. In the interpretation of this word "would," we are not to understand it of the choice or will, but only a desire. Otherwise the apostle contradicts a plain matter of fact, which everybody knows to be true, that the will governs the conduct. Professor Stuart has very properly rendered the word desire; what I desire, I do not, but what I disapprove, that I do. Then comes the conclusion, "If, then, I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law, that it is good." If I do that which I disapprove, if I disapprove of my own conduct, if I condemn myself, I thereby bear testimony that the law is good. Now, keep your eye on the object the apostle has in view, and read the next verse, "Now then it is no more that I do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." Here he, as it were, divides himself against himself, or speaks of himself as possessing two natures, or, as some of the heathen philosophers taught, as having two souls, one which approves the good and another which loves and chooses evil. "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not." Here "to will" means to approve, for if men really will to do a thing, they do it. This everybody knows. Where the language will admit, we are bound to interpret it so as to make it consistent with known facts. If you understand "to will" literally, you involve the apostle in the absurdity of saying that he willed what he did not do, and so acted contrary to his own will, which contradicts a notorious fact. The meaning must be desire. Then it coincides with the experience of every convicted sinner. He knows what he ought to do, and he strongly approves it, but he is not ready to do it. Suppose I were to call on you to do some act. Suppose, for instance, I were to call on those of you who are impenitent, to come forward and take that seat, that we might see who you are, and pray for you, and should show you your sins and that it is your duty to submit to God, some of you would exclaim, "I know it

is my duty, and I greatly desire to do it, but I cannot." What do you mean by it? Why, simply, that on the whole, the balance of your will is on the other side.

In the 20th verse he repeats what he had said before, "Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." Is that the habitual character and experience of a Christian? I admit that a Christian may fall so low that this language may apply to him; but if this is his general character, how does it differ from that of an impenitent sinner? If this is the habitual character of a Christian, there is not a word of truth in the scripture representations, that the saints are those who really obey God; for here is one called a Christian of whom it is said expressly that he never does obey.

"I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present within me." Here he speaks of the action of the carnal propensities, as being so constant and so prevalent that he calls it a "law." "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man." Here is the great stumbling-block. Can it be said of an impenitent sinner that he "delights" in the law of God? I answer, yes. I know the expression is a strong one, but the apostle was using strong language all along, on both sides. It is no stronger language than the prophet Isaiah uses in chapter lviii. He was describing as wicked and rebellious a generation as ever lived. He says, "Cry aloud, spare not; lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins." Yet he goes on to say of this very people, "Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God; they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they TAKE DELIGHT in approaching to God." Here is one instance of impenitent sinners manifestly delighting in approaching to God. So in Ezekiel xxxiii. 32. "And lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not." The prophet had been telling how wicked they were. "And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness." Here were impenitent sinners, plainly enough, yet they loved to hear the eloquent prophet. How often do ungodly sinners delight in eloquent preaching or powerful reasoning, by some able minister! It is to them an intellectual feast. And sometimes they are so pleased with it, as really to think they love the word of God. This is consistent with entire depravity of heart and enmity against the true character of God. Nay, it sets their depravity in a stronger light, because they know and approve the right, and yet do the wrong.

So, notwithstanding this delight in the law, he says, "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. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Here the words, "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord," are plainly a parenthesis, and brake in upon the train of thought. Then he sums up the whole matter, "So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin."

It is as if he had said, My better self, my unbiased judgment, my conscience, approves the law of God; but the law in my members, my passions, have such a control over me that I still disobey. Remember, the apostle was describing the habitual character of one who was wholly under the dominion of sin. It was irrelevant to his purpose to adduce the experience of a Christian. He was vindicating the law, and therefore it was necessary for him to take the case of one who was under the law. If it is Christian experience, he was reasoning against himself, for if it is Christian experience, this would prove, not only that the law is inefficacious for the subduing of passion and the sanctification of men, but that the gospel also is inefficacious. Christians are under grace, and it is irrelevant, in vindicating the law, to adduce the experience of those who are not under the law, but under grace.

Another conclusive reason is, that he here actually states the case of a believer, as entirely different. In verses 4 and 6, he speaks of those who are not under law and not in the flesh, that is, not carnal, but delivered from the law, and actually serving, or obeying God, in spirit.

Then, in the beginning of the 8th chapter, he goes on to say, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, hath made me free from the law of sin and death." He had alluded to this in the parenthesis above, "I thank God," &c. "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Who is this, of whom he is now speaking? If the person in the last chapter was one who had a Christian experience, whose experience is this? Here is something entirely different. The other was wholly under the power of sin, and under the law, and while he knew his duty, never did it. Here we find one for whom what the law could not do, through the power of passion, the gospel has done, so that the righteousness of the law is fulfilled, or what the law requires is obeyed. "For they that are after the flesh, do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace: because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." There it is. Those whom he had described in the 7th chapter, as being carnal, cannot please God. "But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now, if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness." But here is an individual whose body is dead. Before, the body had the control, and dragged him away from duty and from salvation; but now the power of passion is subdued.

Now I will give you the sum of the whole matter:

- (1.) The strength of the apostle's language cannot decide this question, for he uses strong language on both sides. If it is objected that the individual he is describing is said to "delight in the law," he is also said to be "carnal, sold under sin." When a writer uses strong language, it must be so understood as not to make it irrelevant or inconsistent.
- (2.) Whether he spoke of himself, or of some other person, or merely supposed a case by way of illustration, is wholly immaterial to the question.
- (3.) It is plain that the point he wished to illustrate was the vindication of the law of God, as to its influence on a carnal mind.
- (4.) The point required by way of illustration, the case of a convicted sinner, who saw the excellence of the law, but in whom the passions had the ascendancy.
- (5.) If this is spoken of Christian experience, it is not only irrelevant, but proves the reverse of what he intended. He intended to show that the law, though good, could not break the power of passion. But if this is Christian experience, then it proves that the gospel, instead of the law, cannot subdue passion and sanctify men.
- (6.) The contrast between the state described in the 7th chapter, and that described in the 8th chapter, proves that the experience of the former was not that of a Christian.

REMARKS.

I. Those who find their own experience written in the 7th chapter of Romans, are not converted persons. If that is their habitual character, they are not regenerated; they are under conviction, but not Christians.

II. You see the great importance of using the law in dealing with sinners, to make them prize the gospel, to lead them to justify God and condemn themselves. Sinners are never made truly to repent but as they are convicted by the law.

III. At the same time, you see the entire insufficiency of the law to convert men. The case of the devil illustrates the highest efficacy of the law, in this respect.

IV. You see the danger of mistaking mere desires, for piety. Desire, that does not result in right choice, has nothing good in it. The devil may have such desires. The wickedest men on earth may desire religion, and no doubt often do desire it, when they see that it is necessary to their salvation, or to control their passions.

V. Christ and the gospel present the only motives that can sanctify the mind. The law only convicts and condemns.

VI. Those who are truly converted and brought into the liberty of the gospel, do find deliverance from the bondage of their own corruptions.

They do find the power of the body over the mind broken. They may have conflicts and trials, many and severe; but as a habitual thing, they are delivered from the thralldom of passion, and get the victory over sin, and find it easy to serve God. His commandments are not grievous to them. His yoke is easy, and his burden light.

VII. The true convert finds peace with God. He feels that he has it. He enjoys it. He has a sense of pardoned sin, and of victory over corruption.

VIII. You see, from this subject, the true position of a vast many church members. They are all the while struggling under the law. They approve of the law, both in its precept and its penalty, they feel condemned, and desire relief. But still they are unhappy. They have no spirit of prayer, no communion with God, no evidence of adoption. They only refer to the 7th of Romans as their evidence. Such a one will say, "There is my experience exactly." Let me tell you, that if this is your experience, you are yet in the gall of bitterness and the bonds of iniquity. You feel that you are in the bonds of guilt, and you are overcome by iniquity, and surely you know that it is bitter as gall. Now, don't cheat your soul by supposing that with such an experience as this, you can go and sit down by the side of the apostle Paul. You are yet carnal, sold under sin, and unless you embrace the gospel, you will be damned.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/charles-finney/legal-experience/>

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