

# „Geschwächt durch das Fleisch“: Unsere sündhafte Natur und der Gehorsam bei Paulus

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ATS Symposium  
**Vollkommen, sündlos, perfekt:  
Herausforderung und Wirklichkeit**

4.-6. Juli 2014  
Seminar Schloss Bogenhofen

# Introduction

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- ◉ Perfectionism stands or falls on the nature of Jesus Christ.
- ◉ Two positions:
  - Prelapsarianism: Jesus took on unfallen human nature
    - second Adam
  - Postlapsarianism: Jesus was entirely like one of us → fallen human nature
    - son of Mary
    - our Brother

# Introduction

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- ◉ Other important issues:
  - Definition of sin
  - Definition of grace
  - Definition of justification and sanctification
  - Role of faith
  - Role of obedience and good works
  - Meaning of Jesus' expiation
  - Source of authority

# Introduction

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- ◉ Definition of sin: necessary presupposition
  - Pelagian definition
  - Achilles' heel of perfectionism
  - “All heresies spring out from an inadequate sense of sin” (J. Stalker).
- ◉ Nature of Jesus: foundational
  - The column that sustains the whole structure.

# Introduction

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- ◉ A fourfold structure (R. Adams):
  - Jesus was like us (fallen nature)
  - We can be like Him (sinlessness)
  - This should happen before Jesus comes again
  - This is the most urgent message to the church, otherwise there will be no:
    - Latter rain
    - Loud cry
    - Second coming

# Introduction

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- ◉ This is not a theological discussion the nature of Jesus.
- ◉ But, a contextual reading of Rom 8:3 with reference to the nature of Jesus.
  - “For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh.”
- ◉ Main emphases:
  - Sin
  - Nature of Jesus

# Preliminaries

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- ◉ Rom 8: one of the great chapters in the Bible.
  - Begins with: “no condemnation”
  - Ends with: “no separation”
  - No imperatives
  - Powerful message of assurance
    - “I make bold to assert that the great theme of chap. 8 is not sanctification.... The great theme is the security of the Christian” (M. Lloyd-Jones).

# Preliminaries

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- ◉ Most common interpretation: sanctification
  - Chap. 7: indwelling of sin (esp. vss. 14-25)
    - Inability of the law (to secure obedience)
    - Servants of sin
    - Failure and defeat
  - Chap. 8: indwelling of the Spirit (esp. vss. 2-11)
    - Ability to obey
    - Servants of justice
    - Victory and hope



# Preliminaries

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## ◉ Holy Spirit

- 3x in Rom 1-7 (none in 7:14-25)
- 8x in Rom 9-16
- 21x in Rom 8
  - More than any other single chap. in the whole NT.
- Prophets: - the gift of the new age (Isa 44:3; Ezek 11:19-20; 36:26-27; cf. Jer 31:31-34).

# Preliminaries

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- ◉ Sanctifying work of the Spirit in Rom 8:
  - Vs. 2            The law of the Spirit has set us free from the law of sin
  - Vs. 3            This has happened because of what Jesus did on the cross
  - Vs. 4            Now the just requirement of the law can be fulfilled in us, who walk according to the Spirit

# Preliminaries

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- ◉ “Obedience is a necessary and possible aspect of Christian discipleship. Although the law cannot secure this obedience, the Spirit can” (John Stott).
- ◉ “Being characterized by the indwelling of God’s Spirit, this life which is promised for the man who is righteous by faith is necessarily also a life in which God’s law is being established and fulfilled” (C. E. B. Cranfield).

# Contextual exegesis

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- ◉ Famous question: Who is the “I” in 7:14-25
  - Literal (autobiographical):
    - Pre-converted Paul
    - Post-converted Paul
  - Metaphorical:
    - The unregenerate person (“in Adam”; cf. “in Christ” in 8:1)
    - The regenerate and even mature believer

# Contextual exegesis

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- ◉ Greek fathers from Origen onwards:
  - It cannot be Paul:
    - He has just celebrated his transfer to another slavery which in reality is freedom (6:6, 17-18, 22),
    - How can he now say that he is,
      - “sold into slavery under sin” (vs. 14)
      - unable to do what he wants (vs. 15)
      - wretched and longs for deliverance (vs. 24)?
  - He is just impersonating an unregenerate person.

# Contextual exegesis

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- ◉ Augustine, western church, Reformers:
  - Paul writes as a truly regenerate and even mature believer:
    - The way he describes himself:
      - “unspiritual” (vs. 14)
      - “nothing good dwells in me” or his sinful nature (vs. 18)
    - While unbelievers are,
      - self-righteous
      - self-confident

# Contextual analysis

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- Paul's attitude to the law:
  - "holy, righteous, and good" (vs. 12)
  - "spiritual" (vs. 14)
  - "the good I want to do" (vs. 19)
  - "in my inner being I delight in God's law" (vs. 22)
  - "with the mind I myself serve God's law" (vs. 25)
- Paul's longing for deliverance:
  - "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (vs. 24; cf. 8:23)

# Contextual analysis

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- “Paul is thinking specifically of Christians. The verses which follow [vss. 14-25] depict vividly the inner conflict characteristic of the true Christian, a conflict such as is possible only in the man, in whom the Holy Spirit is active and whose mind is being renewed under the discipline of the gospel” (Cranfield).



# Excursus

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- ◉ “It is the grace that Christ implants in the soul which creates in man enmity against Satan. Without this converting grace and renewing power, man would continue the captive of Satan, a servant ever ready to do his bidding. But the new principle in the soul creates conflict where hitherto had been peace....

# Excursus

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Whoever is seen to abhor sin instead of loving it ... displays the operation of a principle wholly from above” (*GC*, 506).

# Contextual exegesis

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- ◉ Fourth evidence: what kind of sin?
  - “I do not understand my own actions” (vs. 15a)
  - “I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate” (vs. 15b)
  - “I do what I do not want” (vs. 16)
  - “It is no longer I who do it” (vs. 17)
  - “I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out” (vs. 18)

# Contextual exegesis

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- “I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing” (vs. 19)
- “If I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it” (vs. 20)
- “I want to do right” (vs. 21)
- “In my inner being I delight in God's law” (vs. 22)
- ◉ What kind of sin is this?
  - Intentional or unintentional?
  - Intentional sins are no longer an issue since vs. 6 (cf. 6:1–7:6).

# Contextual exegesis

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- ◉ Why is Paul/believer unable to meet the righteousness required by the law?
  - “I am of the flesh, sold under sin” (vs. 14)
  - “sin that dwells within me” (vs. 17)
  - “nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh” (vs. 18)
  - “sin that dwells within me” (vs. 20)
  - “evil is present with me” (vs. 21)
  - “captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members” (vs. 23)

# Contextual exegesis

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- ◉ “Law of sin” (vs. 23):
  - “I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to **the law of sin** that dwells in my members” (cf. vs. 25; 8:2).
    - “Law” in Paul: different meanings
    - “Law of sin”:  
“principle” or “rule of action”  
- sinful nature
    - In the flesh: body is not evil, though the forces of evil work through it

# Contextual exegesis

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## ◉ Sinful nature:

- Natural compulsion or inclination to do wrong
- Hereditary (→ Adam) and universal
  - “If each one of us is born without a sinful nature, how do we account for the universality of sin?” (R. C. Sproul).
- OT
  - Job 25:4; Ps 51:5; 58:3; Jer 17:9; etc.
- NT
  - Matt 12:34; Mark 7:21; Jas 1:14; 1 John 2:16; etc.

# Contextual exegesis

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- Most clearly taught by Paul:
  - “by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners” (Rom 5:19)
  - “the natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God” (1 Cor 2:14)
  - “sin ... dwells within me” [→ “flesh”] (Rom 7:17, 20)
  - “the concern of the flesh is hostility toward God” (Rom 8:7)
  - “the desires of the flesh” (Gal 5:16)
  - “the law of sin” [→ “members”] (Rom 7:23, 25; 8:2)



# Contextual exegesis

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- ◉ A development of Paul's former rabbinic theology:
  - Judaism: no doctrine of original sin
  - Tendency to sin, not sinfulness
  - Humans are free to obey or disobey
  - Sin comes only when disobedience occurs
- ◉ Phil 3:6 – faultless observance of the law
  - Paul's pre-conversion theology (cf. Phil 3:12)
  - Obedience to the law as observable conduct
  - Not sinlessness

# Contextual exegesis

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- ◉ It is from the “law of sin” that Paul cries for deliverance:
  - “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (vs. 24).
    - Rhetorical question
    - Implied answer, “Nobody can!”
- ◉ Yet, the real answer is different:
  - “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin” (vs. 25).
    - Deliverance comes through Jesus Christ.

# Contextual exegesis

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- ◉ An intriguing answer for,
  - The situation remains the same as before.
    - “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin” (vs. 25).
  - Full deliverance is an eschatological reality.
    - “And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (8:23).

# Contextual exegesis

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- ◉ Paul is talking about the present.
  - *douleuō* (“to serve”), present tense, as he does in 7:14-23
  - This seems to indicate that the tension between the two natures (cf. 8:2) never ceases to exist as long we live this present life.

# Contextual analysis

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- ◉ Why then his exclamation of gratitude?
  - God's temporary solution to our sinful nature (unintentional sins) occurs outside of us.
  - Rom 8:1        “**There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.**”
  - It is (essentially) a forensic/objective solution.
    - The Bible teaches that justification is both objective (forgiveness) and subjective (regeneration), but here Paul is not talking about conversion, but rather about the Christian life—the unintentional sins committed by the believers.

# Contextual exegesis

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- ◉ The message of Rom 8:
  - Not victory over our sinful nature (perfect obedience) through the power of the Spirit,
  - But, assurance of “no condemnation” because of what Jesus Christ did for us (cf. vss. 31-34).

Implication: God does not seem to treat all sins the same way.

# Contextual exegesis

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- ◉ Chaps. 7 and 8: same person, but from two different perspectives:
  - The law's: - the law will continually expose our sinful passions (cf. 7:7-13)
    - no perfect conformity with the law in this life, only despair and fear of condemnation
  - Christ's: assurance of no condemnation, despite our imperfect life
    - "In Christ"

# Side point

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- ◉ Collateral implication of Rom 7:14-25:
  - Sinful nature prevents fully conformity with the law (→ unintentional sins)
  - No perfect righteousness in this life
  - Never up to Paul's time (cf. 3:10-18).
    - “There is no one who is righteous, not even one.... All have turned aside, together they have become worthless; there is no one who shows kindness, there is not even one” (vss. 10, 12).
    - No hero of faith of Heb 11 was sinless, including Enoch and Moses (→ Elijah? cf. vss. 32, 37).



# Side point

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- Only after glorification (cf. 8:18-30)
  - “Not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, **the redemption of our bodies**” (vs. 23; cf. 1 Cor 15:20-23, 35-58).
  - Only then the whole creation “will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (vs. 21).
  - This is the glory that will be revealed in us,” which contrasts with “our present sufferings” (vs. 18).
  - For “in hope we have been saved” (vs. 24).
  - So we need “patience” (vs. 25).

# Side point

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Whether we like it or not, Paul does not see any definitive solution to our sinful flesh (fallen nature) and its unintentional sins before glorification.

# Contextual exegesis

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## ◉ Rom 8:3

- “For God has done what the law, **weakened by the flesh**, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh.”
- ◉ The impossibility of the law to bring about perfect obedience/righteousness
  - Not the law’s fault (cf. 7:12, 14)
  - The flesh’s fault: *astheneō*, “be sick/weak”

# Contextual exegesis

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- ◉ God's solution:
  - He sent Jesus "in the likeness of sinful flesh," so He was able to condemn sin in the flesh
- ◉ What does Paul really say?
  - Not "in sinful flesh" (fallen nature)
  - Not "in the likeness of flesh" (Docetism)
  - But, "in the **likeness** of sinful flesh"
- ◉ What does he mean?
  - If what makes perfect obedience impossible is the infirmity of the flesh (sinful flesh), had Jesus come with such infirmity it would have been impossible for Him as it is for us.

# Linguistic analysis

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- ◉ “Likeness”: *homoiōma*
  - 6x in the NT: similar in appearance, not fully identical
  - Rom 6:5 “For if we have been united together in the likeness [*homoiōma*] of His death, certainly we also shall be *in the likeness* of His resurrection.”
  - Rev 9:7 “In appearance the locusts were like [*homoiōma*] horses equipped for battle.”

# Linguistic analysis

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## ◉ *homoīōma* in Phil 2:7

- He “emptied Himself, taking the form [*morphē*] of a servant, being made in human likeness [*homoīōma*].”
  - “...in the likeness of men” (NASB).
- Not fully human?
  - Full humanity → *morphē*: the outward appearance that reveals the inward nature
  - But, Jesus was also fully God → “in the form [*morphē*] of God” (vs. 6)
  - In a sense, Jesus was not an ordinary men

# Linguistic analysis

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- ◉ *TDNT*, 5:195-196:

- “With his *en homoiōmati* Paul is showing that for all the similarity between Christ’s physical body and that of men there is an essential difference between Christ and men. Even in His earthly life Christ was still the Son of God. This means that He became man without entering the nexus of human sin. The words *en homoiōmati* keep us from a deduction which Paul did not wish to make, namely,

# Linguistic analysis

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- “that Christ became subject to the power of sin.... The *homoiōma* thus indicate two things, first the likeness in appearance, and secondly the distinction in essence.... With this body the intrinsically sinless Christ became the representative of sinful mankind.... Christ took the likeness of *sarx hamartias* in order that God in Christ might achieve the liberation of mankind from sin.”



# Linguistic analysis

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## ◉ Herbert E Douglass:

- “If Paul meant that Jesus took some other form of humanity than what any other man has had to live with, he probably would have said, ‘in the likeness of sinless flesh.’”
- Semantic problem:
  - *homoiōma*: “fully identical”
  - This would destroy Paul’s argument in Rom 7-8
- Theological problem:
  - Would Jesus be less than human if He had come with Adam’s prelapsarian nature?

# Theological implications

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- ◉ Rom 8:3 requires that Jesus' nature was not fully identical to ours.
  - *homoīōma*
  - Context
- ◉ He did not have sinful tendencies.
  - John 14:10 “The ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me.”
- ◉ How could He then be tempted in every respect as we are (Heb 2:17-18; 4:15)?

# Theological implications

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- ◉ Heb 2:17-18; 4:14-16
  - Jesus' qualifications as our High Priest
  - Fully human (cf. 1 Tim 2:5)
  - Subject to the same temptations and sufferings
    - Physical limitations
    - Moral temptations (principle, not kind)
      - to disobey the Father (John 5:30; 6:38)
      - to seek after His own agenda (Matt 26:38-44)
      - to act independently from the Father (Matt 4:2-4)
      - to misuse God's promises (vss. 5-7)
      - to renounce His loyalty to God (vss. 8-10)

# Theological implications

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- ◉ The Second Adam concept

- Rom 5:18-19; 1 Cor 15:45-49

- Ellen G. White

- “Christ is called the second Adam. In purity and holiness, connected with God and beloved by God, He began where the first Adam began. Willingly He passed over the ground where Adam fell, and redeemed Adam's failure” (*ML*, 323).

# Theological implications

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- “Be careful, exceedingly careful as to how you dwell upon the human nature of Christ. Do not set Him before the people as a man with the propensities of sin. He is the second Adam. The first Adam was created a pure, sinless being, without a taint of sin upon him; he was in the image of God. He could fall, and he did fall through transgressing. Because of sin his posterity was born with inherent propensities of disobedience.

# Theological implications

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- “But Jesus Christ was the only begotten Son of God. He took upon Himself human nature, and was tempted in all points as human nature is tempted. He could have sinned; He could have fallen, but not for one moment was there in Him an evil propensity” (*SDABC*, 5:1128).

# Theological implications

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- ◉ Final argument based on an empirical observation:
  - Every child before being able to make conscious choices gives plenty of evidence of selfishness.
    - No child has to learn how to be selfish.
    - “The doctrine of original sin is the only empirically verifiable doctrine of the Christian faith” (R. Niebuhr).

# Theological implications

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## ◉ Ellen G. White:

- “We have hereditary tendencies to wrong.... It is a weakness of humanity to pet selfishness, because it is a natural trait of character” (*FLB*, 140).
- “Selfishness [is] inherent in the natural heart” (*DA*, 678).
- “Man is Satan’s captive and is naturally inclined to follow his suggestions and do his bidding” (*Test.*, 5:294).



# Theological implications

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- What about Jesus? Before reaching the age of conscience was He different from other children?
- If yes, then He did not have a fallen nature.
- If no, then there was sin in Him.
  - How can someone be selfish without having sin in himself, or without being a sinner?
  - “Selfishness is not a Christian characteristic; it is an attribute of the great apostate” (*ST*, June 13, 1892).
  - In fact, selfishness is the essence of sin.

# Conclusion

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- ◉ This presentation → limited to Rom 8:3
  - Contextual reading
    - ◉ “weakened by the flesh”
    - ◉ “in the likeness of sinful flesh”
- ◉ Rom 8:3 requires Jesus nature to have been prelapsarian.
  - He came “in the likeness of sinful flesh.”
  - Otherwise, it would have been impossible for Him—as it is for us—to meet all the righteousness required by the law, particularly at the level of unintentional sins (→ fallen nature).

# Conclusion

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- ◉ Relevant topics:

- Jesus' mission and the Second Adam concept
- Definition and the effects of sin
- Unintentional vs. intentional sins