

Our Struggle with Sin (*Part 3*)

Romans 7:13-20

Sermon-in-a-Sentence: Our sinful nature battles with our new nature and the Spirit of God living within us, preventing us from doing the good we know we should.

We all struggle with sin; we all do things we know are wrong and we don't understand why. As Christians, why do we at times deliberately rebel against God and disobey His Word? Why do we sometimes choose to sin?

In Romans 7:7-12, Paul said that God's Law (summarized by the Ten Commandments), even though it actually stimulates our evil desires, is nevertheless holy, righteous and good for two very important reasons. Because the Law reveals and makes known to us:

- 1) What sin is; the Law defines sin.
- 2) How exceedingly sinful our own sinful nature really is.

In Romans 7:7-8:2 Paul is sharing his own personal struggle with sin and his sinful nature. As a devout Jew, a "Hebrew of Hebrews", he diligently sought to keep the Law. But he discovered, to his amazement, that he could not earn a right standing before God or gain eternal life by keeping the Law. The Law condemned him to death before the Lord. Trying to keep the Law of God cannot save us from the death penalty of sin and it cannot deliver us from the deadly power of our own sinful nature! We need a Savior who can deliver us from the penalty of our sins and a Sanctifier who can deliver us from the power of our sinful nature.

"But when this priest [the Lord Jesus Christ] had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever [Christ as our *Savior*] those who are being made holy [Christ as our *Sanctifier*]." (Hebrews 10:12-14)

13 Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means!

- Why not? Because the problem is not God's righteous Law; the problem is Man's sinful nature! It is not the Law that causes our spiritual death, it is our sin! (cf. Romans 6:23)

But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.

- Sin puts us to death by means of the Law.
- "It is sin, not the law, that brings death, and it is only through the law that sin can be recognized as sin. Sin uses the commandments in the law, that are good, in order to continue to produce death in people because people cannot keep the law in their own strength. But, by using the commandments as instruments of death, sin reveals itself in all its ugliness." (*The Life Application Commentary*)
- Used in the right manner, God's Law serves the purpose of showing us how exceedingly sinful sin is and how exceedingly weak we are in keeping it. It shows us that we need a Savior!
- In verses 14ff Paul not only uses personal pronouns, he speaks in the present tense: this was his present, ongoing struggle!

14 We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.

- The Law comes from God; it is, therefore, inherently holy, righteous and good (vs. 12).
- In sharp contrast to this, Paul and all of us, are unspiritual—carnal, fleshly, enslaved to and under the control of our old sinful habits. Every believer is capable of submitting to sin as the master of his life rather than living in the freedom that Christ has won for us on the cross. (cf. Philippians 2:12; 2 Peter 3:17-18; 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; 1 Timothy 4:7)
- “Being born again takes a moment of faith, but becoming like Christ is a lifelong process. Paul compares Christian growth to a strenuous race or fight...” (*LASB Study Bible, p. 2418*).
- The Bible teaches the Eternal Security of the Believer, that we will never lose nor forsake our salvation. But this is not a license for careless living! The Bible also teaches the Perseverance of the Saints, that genuine faith will manifest itself in the daily crucifixion of our old sinful nature. (cf. Romans 2:7; 1 Corinthians 15:58; Galatians 6:7-9; Philippians 3:13-14; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; Hebrews 4:11; 6:10-11; 12:1; 2 Peter 1:5-10).

15 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.

- The struggle between the old and new natures of the Christian that Paul describes here is common to all Christians. That struggle creates confusion and discouragement. We must learn to persevere in the Christian life and not give up. (cf. Galatians 6:7-10)

16 And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. 17 As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.

- Paul is not denying his personal responsibility for sin. He is describing the powerful control that sin can have over the careless Christian’s life if he or she is operating in the energy of the flesh rather than in the power of the Holy Spirit. (cf. Genesis 4:6-7)
- We must continually be on guard against the evil desires of our sinful nature to prevent them from taking control of our lives.
- The new nature that we received when we accepted Jesus Christ as our Savior and the Holy Spirit dwelling within us are constantly in conflict with our old fallen sinful nature.

18 I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.

- Willpower alone is not sufficient to overcome the desires of our sinful nature. We must learn how to live and walk in the power of the Holy Spirit who enables us to live a life of obedience to the Lord. (Romans 8)

19 For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

- We will struggle with sin throughout our entire lives. (cf. Galatians 5:17; 1 John 1:8-9)
- We can and should grow in sanctification by the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. (cf. Romans 8:2, 4, 9, 13-14)
- We live in a time of tension between the “already” aspect of salvation (that believers *have already been saved* from the *penalty* of sin) and the “not yet” aspect (that believers will ultimately *be saved* from the *power* and *presence* of sin for all eternity at the return of Christ).