

WE'RE NOT DEAD YET

ROMANS 7:14-25

'We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. 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. So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.'

Romans 7:14-25

<https://my.bible.com/bible/111/ROM.7.14-25>

TALE OF TWO CHRISTIANS

We have probably all heard amazing testimonies from people who were trapped by intense addictions or other horrible situations and then they turned to Jesus Christ and boom! The intense addiction or horrible situation is cured and they are free from the sins that gripped them so tightly. Yet, here you are... struggling with your sins. Were they lying? If they have such brilliant testimonies but you've known the Lord for 2, 5, 45 years and you've never had that kind of victory over sin, are you really a Christian? What's wrong with you, anyway?

We are familiar with John Wesley's phrase, the "almost Christian." The almost Christians often have just enough church and Sunday School to inoculate them from truly and passionately following Christ. They've heard some sort of moral religious encouragement, or maybe they've even heard the gospel, but have rejected it enough times to develop a robust resistance to it. They've never surrendered to Christ. They aren't trusting Him as Savior, or making Him the Ultimate Boss of their lives - their Lord and King. They have Christosity, but not Christ.

On the other hand, there's the "altogether Christian." Altogether Christians *have* surrendered to Christ, *are trusting* Him as Savior, and *have* made Him the Ultimate Boss - their Lord and King. Yet, as Thomas C. Oden writes in his *Notes on Wesley's Teaching*, "one may be

an ‘altogether Christian’ and still continue to struggle with a weak or partially blinded faith.” Article of Religion of the Methodist Church XII includes this, “After we have received the Holy Ghost, we may depart from grace given, and fall into sin, and, by the grace of God, rise again and amend our lives.”

Clearly, real Christians can sin and not only can they sin, but a vibrant Christian may even struggle with sin in their lives. We have the Apostle Paul’s own admission as testimony. “I do not do the good I want to do, but the sin I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. What a wretch I am! Who will rescue me?”

Sin is an old-fashioned word, if you’re taking a stand against it. Otherwise, sin is cool, alluring, and very relevant. **[slide of Romans 3:23]** Romans 3:23 is a famous verse about sin, stating that all of us have sinned, and fallen short of the glory of God. Sin, as an action, came into the New Testament from the sport of archery. You’ve probably heard this a million times. Sin is missing the target, falling short, doing things that don’t measure up to God’s perfect standards. “But,” you may protest, “That’s pretty much everything I do!” And you would be correct. Isaiah proclaims that “**all our righteousness is like filthy rags**” (Isaiah 64:6) and there is no way to measure up.

IN THE BEGINNING

Last week, Pastor Richard reminded us that sin as a state of being came to us through Adam and Eve. They gave into the temptation of “being like God” and bit into the fruit of the one tree from which God forbade them to eat. If I were God I would have screamed, “YOU HAD ONE JOB, ADAM! ONE JOB!” But you know what? God is God and I am not. We can all breathe a sigh of relief. Instead of screaming, God fashioned clothing for Adam and Eve to wear so that they could come near to Him again without shame and walk with Him in fellowship in the cool of the day as they did before, but they never did. Sin entered the world through the first humans and infected the entire human race. The ones who were charged with caring for the rest of the world shattered its perfection then and there. The sinful condition separated humanity from the Creator and caused the rest of creation to groan (Romans 8:22).

This is a bleak and hopeless situation except that moment when Jesus Christ died for us. He took our sins, nailing them to the cross.

When we first trust in Christ as Savior from our sins, He gives us His righteousness and we can stand justified before God. We become new creations, the old is past away and the new has come. Oftentimes there is a euphoria that comes with this experience. And then begins this process of restoring our inner selves to God’s original intent for us: perfect fellowship with Him. **[Slide: God’s original intent for us is perfect fellowship with Him.]** That is the process of sanctification. Romans 8:23 **[Slide of Romans 8:23, NIV]** then says that we, as those who suddenly have within us a glimpse of God’s intention for us and all creation, begin to

groan as well. We become aware of sin, its grip on us, and the fact that sin, as a state of being and as action, is holding us back.

Christians sin because we're human and susceptible to temptations from external and internal sources. We sin because we have the old habits of our old life and we have the old nature inside of us, seeking to distract us from the new life the Holy Spirit is bringing forth within us. We sin because we don't hate our own sin, even though we often do a great job hating the sins of others. We sin because we're not dead yet.

In the remainder of this time together, I plan to address the issues of temptation, old habits and old nature, how sin affects us, why we should hate sin and whose sin we should hate the most, and finally, God's remedy for sin.

TEMPTATION

James gives us the most succinct explanation for how sin comes about in us. Let's read James 1:14-15 together, out loud: **"People are tempted when, by their own evil desire, they are dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived it gives birth to sin."** (James 1:14-15)

Temptation does not equal sin. Temptation is an attack. It's not your fault that you are attacked. Just like it's not your fault if you have feelings that are negative. Your feelings are your feelings. This temptation is a temptation.

It's what you do in the next moment that makes the difference. When you allow the temptation to percolate within you, when you give that thought more time than the moment of temptation, that is where the trouble begins. When you go back for that second piece of chocolate cake, or lasagna, or that second look or scroll, ... when you begin to make plans for how you'll cheat on that homework assignment or turn someone against someone else ... that next step of response toward the temptation and away from God, that's when sin is conceived.

Sin can be visible or invisible. Sins are not just outward actions. For instance, the 10 Commandments forbids coveting. Coveting? What's that? Being jealous to the point of wanting to possess what someone else has: whether it's a house, a pile of money, or a spouse. In fact, Jesus repeats this commandment in Matthew 5 when He says that anyone who looks at another man's wife to covet her is equal to one who has already taken her and committed adultery.

Temptation knocks on the door. When you open the door, either through action or lingering thought, that's when sin gets its opportunity. When Cain first got angry over Abel's offering being accepted and his being rejected, God said to Cain, **"You will be accepted if you**

do what is right. But if you refuse to do what is right, then watch out! Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master.” (Genesis 4:7, NLT)

OLD HABITS AND OLD NATURE

It’s popular today to say someone has been “triggered” when they’re mad about something or otherwise out of control. There is some legitimacy to this. This is often how sin gets our attention.

Many of us have a past from before we surrendered our lives to Christ, trusted in Him as Savior, and made Him the Ultimate Boss - Lord and King. We may have experienced what it feels like to be forgiven and for the first time we felt real joy in our lives. If you are a new Christian and you are experiencing this right now, praise God! Use this time to develop good habits that will help ground you in your faith. Find a good church and a mentor who has known Christ for a while and knows the Scriptures, too, and can help you. But don’t expect to always have these feelings of euphoria. It’s great to have them but as you know, feelings will come and go. That doesn’t mean your relationship with Christ isn’t real, it just means that you are human. The victory that comes through following Christ is a victory won by faithfulness, not feelings. Many young Christians turn away from Christ once these euphoric feelings fade.

Eventually, something or somebody will come across your trigger. Something or somebody will remind you of an old pattern you had before you knew Jesus. And, you know, the devil would love nothing more than to remind you of those old patterns, too. It’s at that moment you decide, actively or passively: who is going to control me? My new, Spirit-empowered self-controlled self or my old sin-controlled self? The old ways are calling me, and the old nature is still there, but it is chained. At first, at least, the old nature will only have the power that *I* give it. Listen up about that old nature:

Just because it still remains, doesn’t mean it has to reign. (invite everyone to repeat that at least once)

Others of us came to Christ when we were young, before we could get that past that makes for a dynamic salvation testimony. But we still have an old nature who likes to rattle his chains and howl and tell us of a make-believe fun-filled life we missed because we were busy being good.

If you are a younger adult who has grown up in faith (that was me three decades ago), sometimes the old nature will yell out doubts that fill your minds and cause you to feel disillusioned. Sometimes the sinful behavior of other “church folk” or cultural Christian leaders or even non-Christians, will cause you to want to separate yourself from the church because it’s too easy to equate church and even Christ with cultural expressions of faith that seem empty. It’s good to find an authentic Christian community; it’s unhealthy to isolate yourself

from God’s people in the process. It’s good to question beliefs that seem to bear no good fruit, but it’s unhealthy to cut yourself off from the Savior who loves you and gave His life for you. It’s good to think differently than an older generation, it’s unhealthy to ignore the Scriptures. Don’t amp up the volume of an old nature that’s been starving in the corner. Keep starving it! Just because it still remains, doesn’t mean it has to reign.

Even though I’ve known Christ for, going on 46 years now, I can still struggle with my old nature. Yes, it has been rendered powerless by God. But I can give it power when I listen, believe, think and act on what it tells me instead of what the Spirit of God is speaking into my life. Just because it still remains, doesn’t mean it has to reign.

HOW SIN AFFECTS US

Suffering of Remorse. Remorse comes from conviction or false guilt. It may feel the same at first, but leads to different places.

CONVICTION	FALSE GUILT
Conscience and the Holy Spirit	Defeatist voice that says you’ll never measure up
Results in repentance	Results in fear, isolation, plunges sin further into secrecy.

Stops our prayers

1. Sin can keep our prayers from being fully heard. (Psalm 66:18; 1 Peter 3:7 & 4:7, and others)
2. When you have false guilt, do you feel like praying? (I don’t)

Stifles the Spirit’s progress in our lives

“Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus. Do not stifle the Holy Spirit. Do not scoff at prophecies, Stay away from every kind of evil.” 1 Thessalonians 5:16-20,22

Side effects emotionally, relationally, mentally, and even physically.

HATING SIN

Those of you are raising or have raised kids, are you going through or have you gone through that period of time when your child is moving from concrete to abstract thinking? And it seems like they're caught in between? That moment when they take a metaphor literally is kind of funny.

A few days ago Dumisani and I were sitting at the breakfast table and we were listening to the end of Matthew chapter 5 being read:

'So if your eye—even your good eye —causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your hand—even your stronger hand —causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.' (Matthew 5:29-30)

“Dad,” Dumisani made a face, “That’s gross! Did He really say that?” I began to explain it was a metaphor and if Jesus meant that literally then Christians throughout the ages would have been cutting off hands or gouging out eyes and as we laughed together I realized, I’d always focused on being afraid of hell... but what if my hatred of sin was so strong that I would rather cut off my right hand than have it lead me into sin again?

And if we really hate sin, **what sins should we hate the most? Whose sins should we hate the most? ... Ours.** If we hated our own sin, what effect could that have on our lives?

We’re not dead yet, but neither is God. Jesus Christ suffered our torture, died our death, and then was raised from the dead by the power of God, triumphing over death, hell, and the grave... and sin! Jesus Christ, in His overcoming death and resurrection, offers victory over sin.

The old Evangelical United Brethren Church in which I spent the first nine years of my life, held to this as part of their statement of faith:

We believe regeneration is the renewal of man in righteousness through Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, whereby we are made partakers of the divine nature and experience newness of life. By this new birth the believer becomes reconciled to God and is enabled to serve Him with the will and the affections.

We believe, although we have experienced regeneration, it is possible to depart from grace and fall into sin; and we may ever then, by the grace of God, be renewed in righteousness.

GOD'S REMEDY FOR SIN: STILL THE GOSPEL

We are renewed by the same Gospel that brought us in in the first place! It is good not only at the moment of salvation, but time and time again, for even as redeemed souls, we still find ourselves poor and needy, being attacked by an enemy greater than we are... but greater is HE that is in us than he that is in the world!

We apply the Gospel once again through:

1. Faith and Repentance: Believing the truth, and turning once again toward our loving Heavenly Father.
2. Confession: Owning the sin that I have committed, and agreeing with God that it is sin and it is harmful.
3. Just saying "no": When temptation comes to knock, or when a negative emotion floods in, or when somebody or something finds your trigger, STOP! Take a deep breath! Pray! Ask for the strength of the Holy Spirit in this moment! And make a choice away from that temptation, away from that emotion, away from that trigger. Jesus calls you an overcomer in Him, not a victim.
4. Actively saying "yes" ... not to sin, but to aspects of the righteous life God desires. Take one step in a direction toward God. Just one. Then another. The goal is perfection, but at this point, God is more interested in our direction. Perfection will come in His timing. Direction will move you to becoming more and more like Jesus, allowing the Gospel to really get under your skin. Direction is a partnership between God and you that can be supported and directed in a Gospel-driven community with other followers of Christ, if you will allow it.
5. Filling our minds with God-thoughts. With gratitude. With Scripture. Again, Paul, **Romans 8:6: "For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace."**

We're not dead yet! Praise God, neither is the Holy Spirit, and as He seeks to draw us in, we too can take steps toward Him and allow Him to bring us life and peace. As we say, "Yes!" to Him more, He will guide our choices so we can find ourselves moving, from glory to glory, in Christlikeness that is more than skin deep. May it be so in our lives. Amen.