

ROMANS 7:16- 8:1-7 "How Do We Live By The Spirit, As Opposed To The Flesh?"

All of chapter 7 and part of chapter 8 is where the apostle Paul is dealing with the law and the way it entices the flesh, or the old sinful desires of the nature which prefers sin, as opposed to our new nature in Christ that desires to please God.

Last week I left you with 5 principles in dealing with the war between the old self and the new nature in Christ.

1) We need to first consciously commit ourselves to God's sovereign rule in our lives. In other words trust Him completely. Pro 3:5 "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.."

2) Learn to recognize sin by knowing the truth of God's word as it addresses those things that do not please our Savior.

3) We then need to learn to nip sin in the bud. Taking every thought captive we do not let sin blossom by entertaining its enticement.

James touches on this in Jam 1:13-15 "When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."

The desire is conceived and acted upon when we choose to walk into its path, which is why Paul tells us in Rom 6:12-13 "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. 13 Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness."

4) We need to be willing to confess our sin to God when we do sin.

1Jo 1:9 "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

5) And we need to pray with thanksgiving to God in every circumstance and not lose heart.

Phi 4:6-7 "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

As we go through our text this morning we'll see how we can work through this struggle of the two battling natures, and in practical ways which God gives us, overcome the temptations to choose to sin, and instead seek the One who came to die for our sin, delivering us from its penalty and power.

Let's start with the first verse of our text:

Rom 7:16 "And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good."

'If I do those things which the law calls sinful and against the holy God who gave the law, then I have to agree with God that His law is doing its job of convicting me of sin and pointing me to Christ and it is therefore good.'

And so principle number one is what Paul is putting into effect. I need to first consciously commit myself to God's sovereign rule in my life. In other words trust Him completely. If I recognize His law to be good, which cannot save, how much more should I recognize His Son to be good who does save?

Rom 7:17 "As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me."

Here's a verse we would love to take out of context and just paste it everywhere for the world to see. 'Did I just sin? Was that me? You'll have to excuse me because that wasn't me it was my alter-ego, the one who borrowed my body for a moment while I was in the Bahamas. Blame him.'

Now before we get the idea that Paul is schizophrenic, it's important to see how he uses the first person pronoun "I" to describe what appears to be two people.

On the one hand "it is no longer "I" myself who do it, but it is sin living in me."

And yet on the other hand as we see in Rom 7:22 "For in my inner being I delight in God's law;"

Is Paul excusing himself of sin when the sin living in him is doing something ungodly as though he doesn't take personal

responsibility for it? Not at all! He is simply making the point that there is this war which has two conflicting desires. When he sins it is the sinful nature which, as he says in verse 17, is still living in him.

When he does that which pleases God he is doing that which the inner man, the renewed man in Christ, or the new nature is desiring, which he lays claim to.

He does not lay claim to the old sinful nature because it no longer owns him and he will not call it the real "I", if you will. Rather he refers to it as the other one who still resides in his body.

It's not as though he's referring to a separate person from himself, but a nature inside of him which wants to go in the opposite direction and is tearing at the new person he is in Christ, who wants to follow Jesus.

Both of these aspects Paul refers to as "I". As Hodge puts it, "the one is 'I' my flesh; the other is 'I' my inner man. By the inner man is to be understood the 'new man'."

He's not making the excuse that this old sinful nature is out of control and not able to be bridled. If that were the case he could not say to us, which would include himself, in Rom 6:12 "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires."

What he is saying is that the old sinful nature, if not properly checked, will be out of control and will move in a direction away from God. That's the thing that Paul hates and it is why he says, it's not the real me, the renewed me in Christ, but the old me who was destined to perish because of its evil desires.

‘But because it’s a part of me none the less, I can't excuse my sin, but let's lay the blame where it belongs; on my sinfulness which is still present in the members of my body. It's not to be blamed on the new man who has been given new life in Christ.’

Charles Hodge makes a very good point here. Referring to verse 17 Hodge says: "This is not said as an exculpation (free from blame), but to exhibit the extent and power of indwelling sin, which it is beyond our own power, and beyond the power of the law, to eradicate or effectually control."

This power struggle is the thing Paul is describing. And he explains it in terms like the flesh as opposed to the inner man.

Whenever he uses such terms he's simply showing the difference between the old nature, (the old self), and the new nature in Christ.

By the flesh he does not mean the physical body as being the seat of sin. If that were the case the works of the flesh must be limited to the fleshly parts of our bodies. If that were so Gal.5:19 would make sense only as it included such fleshly sins as sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.... But Paul also includes such things as idolatry and hatred, discord, jealousy, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy.

Those are problems which go beyond just flesh. It's a spiritual problem which is worked out in many ways in our fleshly bodies. It's a spiritual war in a physical world. That's why Paul encourages us to not fight this battle in the flesh or with worldly weapons; weapons which are devised by the sinful nature, which are not from above.

He goes on to say Rom 7:18-23 "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. [Or my flesh] For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. 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. 21 So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. 22 For in my inner being I delight in God's law; 23 but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members."

Principle number two.... Paul has learned to recognize sin by knowing the truth of God's word as it addresses those things that do not please our Savior.

But, it looks as though he's given up and has conceded to the old nature or the flesh as he calls it. This war can't seem to be won.

Rom 7:24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"

And it is at this point that Paul brings us to our knees in total despair, because that's exactly where he wants us to be if we think we can win this battle in the flesh.

3) We then need to learn to nip sin in the bud. Taking every thought captive we do not let sin blossom by entertaining its enticement.

But nipping sin in the bud must be done in accordance not only with God's word, but in the power of the Spirit. Look who Paul looks to as he brings us to the end of ourselves.

Rom 7:25 "Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin."

He gives glory to God who has delivered him from this frustration of this war being waged in the members of his body, by giving him a new nature which is not subject to sin and death or to the power of sin and death, because it's a nature from above which has at its very essence, life. Not a life we conjure up, but the life of Christ Himself in us. That's why Paul can say "Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

Paul clearly recognizes his new life in Christ, but he also clearly recognizes the old self. So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin."

And until we see a clear distinction between the two we'll be tempted to live in the old self and think I can get past this sin on my own terms when in fact Paul wants us to realize that the old self will win until we finally come to the point in Rom 7:24 "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"

In other words, 'Only you Lord can deliver me. I've got to let go of that "self" which thinks it knows the way and the means of moving ahead with You.'

And there's where principle number 4 comes into play so often. We need to be willing to confess our sin to God when we do sin, realizing that self's way out is sinful if it's not according to what God has designed for our escape according to His word.

1Jo 1:9 "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

Thanks be to God!

Rom 8:1-2 "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death."

This is a verse we often quote to show how we as believers will not come under God's condemnation which is to say that we are declared by Christ, not guilty. But in the context of our study it

seems misplaced. We've been talking about the law and the two natures which are at war. What does all of this have to do with condemnation?

The issue has been that the law condemns and that the old self or the flesh operates within that sphere of the law and is trapped in its power which will bring condemnation because sin has not been dealt with.

The only way sin can be dealt with is by grace, not law. To be under law is to be under its authority. To be under grace is to be under its authority and protection in Christ, who frees us from condemnation by becoming sin on our behalf and then paying our penalty even though He was sinless.

If you are in Christ; in other words, under the protection of His blood by faith in His substitutionary atonement, then you are given life eternal and the down payment for that life is the Holy Spirit who gives life to our spirits making us new creatures in Christ.

Condemnation cannot touch us because the death penalty has been lifted. We are no longer identified with death because we are no longer under the authority of the law, but under grace's protection. Remember, "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive." (1Co 15:22)

As believers who are we in? In Christ. Paul's point then is if we are in Christ we have an active, power-filled, God-centered life, and sin and death no longer has mastery over us. That's not wishful thinking, that's a fact.

And that's why Paul could say in Rom 8:2 "because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death."

We have a new Master, a new Lord, and God is the One who has given us this new life in which we are to live and walk by faith every day. Now Paul goes on to explain this new life, this new man we have become by faith in Christ and how this is to affect our walk with God.

He does it by once again bringing into contrast how we used to depend on a lifeless approach to this life (ie., the law), and then showing how we must first be given life, (you must be born again), to have the ability to live it, in the power of this new life which is life in the Holy Spirit.

Rom 8:3 "For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, [Or the flesh]; God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man", ...

The law had no power to bring us into a relationship with God. The only power it had was to condemn us. But God did accomplish this task by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering.

This statement does not mean that Christ was born into this world with sinful flesh; that is with a sin nature like ours.

2Co 5:21 "God made him who had no sin to be sin [Or be a sin offering] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Rather, He was born in the "likeness" of sinful flesh. In other words, His flesh was just like ours in the sense, as Hodge puts it, "Christ took our physically dilapidated nature, subject to the infirmities which sin had brought into it. He was therefore susceptible to pain, and weariness, and sorrow. He could be touched with a sense of our infirmities. He was tempted in all points as we are. He is therefore a merciful and trustworthy High Priest."

And then having come into the world He condemned sin in the flesh. I like that imagery and the reality of that truth. Sin had condemned us to a Godless eternity. God comes into the world in Christ and condemns sin.

He beats sin at its own game. He lives a sinless life, and in that, gains the victory for us. In victory sin is defeated and condemned to have no power over us in a judicial sense and also in a practical sense, to a great degree.

Judicially, the law has been satisfied in Christ and by faith in Him and His work on our behalf, we have satisfied the demands of the law and therefore are not condemned.

Rom 8:4 "in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit."

Practically, or experientially, sin is condemned so as not to have us in bondage, where prior to that we could only satisfy the desires of the flesh. Now in Christ we have the power and the ability to

please God and turn away from the power of the old self, so that we don't "live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit."

Rom 8:5 "Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires."

He speaks of the two different types of people in this world. Those who live according to the sinful nature, (unbelievers) and those who live in accordance with the Spirit, believers.

The result of either position is found in Rom 8:6-7 "The mind of sinful man [Or mind set on the flesh] is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; 7 the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so."

The context contrasts two diametrically opposed lives. One in bondage to sin and its condemnation, the other a life of faith in Christ, no longer controlled by the flesh, but by the Spirit.

For the believer we need to consider the Spirit controlled life and ask God to help us in our unbelief when we're tempted to think He doesn't have the power to keep us from the desires of the flesh.

Who do we want to be controlled by? Our old task master, who has nothing but death as a reward, or our new Lord who has given us life and broken the chains of death and its power?

This is where the fifth principle comes into play.

5) We need to pray with thanksgiving to God in every circumstance and not lose heart.

Phi 4:6-7 "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Prayer is a means of communion, it's a means of exercising our faith and it's a means of setting our minds on the things of the Spirit. It is God's way of allowing us to enter into His presence with the express purpose of drawing upon His power.

William Barclay puts it this way. "Because of what Jesus did, there opens out to the Christian a life no longer dominated by the flesh but by that Spirit of God, which fills a man with a power not

his own. The penalty of the past is removed and strength for his future is assured."

There are times when we set our minds on the things of the flesh; things to which we have died to in Christ. As I mentioned in our men's study on Monday evening, when we return to entertain the things of the flesh it's like a dog returning to its vomit.

In our new nature sin should be seen as disgusting as that image and instead of seeing vomit as roast beef, to be savored in our mouths, it should be seen for what it is and rejected.

And as we turn our eyes upon Jesus and reflect on what He did to pay for those sins, hopefully the full force of the heinousness of our sin will come into play and we will embrace the grace of God and live obedient lives in conformity to the Spirit who gives life and power.

Our love for Him will be expressed as we consider how He first loved us and gave Himself for our sin. Loving God and desiring to please Him by faith is to live by the power of the Spirit. "So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature." (Gal 5:16)