

INDWELLING SIN AND CONFLICT

Every Christian who has sought to be honest with himself and God has found, through personal experience, the sinfulness of his own being. When we were first saved, we were all excited about Christ and our new walk with Him, but as we began to grow in grace and knowledge of the Word, we began to see God's standards for Christian living and our inability to meet these standards. The harder we tried to keep the Law of God, the more impossible it seemed. Then one day we realized in our basic person, even as saved people, we were sinful in our very natures. We became discouraged, probably defeated and possibly driven to the point of despair as we began to wrestle with this powerful force for evil in us.

As new Christians, it is frustrating to see our determinations to please the Lord melt away when trials and troubles came. It is defeating to see the vows and resolves we make drift away. It is discouraging to find ourselves doing things as Christians we really hate. At this point, sensing we will be ostracized by other Christians, most of us dare not tell anyone about this conflict. Instead, we put up a good, pious, religious front, pretending we are satisfied and happy when in reality we are inwardly unhappy. Then the big cover up begins. We try putting on a religious face, giving off a "do-gooder" stand. We may put a lot of man made taboos in our lives that make us legalistic and miserable. We may resolve to try harder which brings us more frustration. We may get so frustrated that we rebel and will either give up Christianity altogether or keep it at a slight distance, so as to be close enough to it if it is really true that we might believe and go to heaven, but far enough away that we really don't have to get involved with dealing with personal sins in our lives as Christians.

What we often do not realize is that this struggle with sin is normal Christian experience. It is normal in that God uses this struggle to bring us to the end of self and to drive us to Christ who alone can give us deliverance. The Christian life is supernatural. God never intended for Christians to be constantly defeated and He never expected Christians to live the Christian life in their own strength and human effort. God has provided supernatural power for us to live a supernatural life and that power is provided by the Holy Spirit.

THE VICTORIOUS LIFE MOVEMENT

There is a movement today in Christendom called "The Victorious Life" or "The Higher Life" or "The Deeper Life." It is based on First Corinthians 15:57 which says, "*But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" In context, this verse is speaking of our final victory from sin when we receive our new, resurrected bodies, but those who are victorious life teachers take it out of context and make it refer to victorious Christian living now.

This view teaches it is one thing to trust Jesus as Savior to get deliverance from the penalty of sin but quite another to receive Christ as Lord to get deliverance from the power of sin. A Christian who only has Christ as Savior is in the terrible abnormal conflict with sin as defined in Romans 7 and must make Christ Lord of his life so as to experience the life of the Holy Spirit and move into the victorious rest of Romans 8. When one moves into the life of the Spirit, he is no longer in conflict with sin and he rises above problems and difficulties. This is "living life on the highest plane" and is total surrender.

The Victorious Christian Life sounds wonderful but in practice it doesn't work. It must be examined by Scripture and experience. Is it possible to get to a place in experience where there is no more conflict with sin? If there is, then this is a "momentary sinless perfection," which the Bible opposes.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE CHRISTIAN

The Bible teaches the Christian has many forces at work in him. The psychology of a Christian is very complex because God is carrying out the great work of sanctification in him. The unsaved man has a sin nature and his whole personality is affected by the sin in his life. The will, mind and emotion of the unsaved man is enslaved to sin.

However, the Christian, who is a new creation in Christ, is much more complex. The Christian still has a sin nature but he also has a new nature from God (“divine nature” – 2 Peter. 1:3-4) and the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The new nature is the Christian’s capacity for God, and the Holy Spirit is working on the Christian’s total personality, will, mind and emotion, to bring it into conformity to Christ. The result of all this activity is a conflict, a warfare, a battle as the forces of sin and the forces of God struggle for dominance in the Christian. [see Chart #1]

THE FACT OF CONFLICT *“For the sinful nature (flesh) desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict (at war) with each other, so that you do not do what you want”* (Gal. 5:17),

While there is conflict, the Christian experiences this conflict in degrees, for it varies in intensity on different days. Sometimes it is very strong and sometimes it is very minimal but it is always there.

The Holy Spirit and the sin nature are “contrary to one another.” This is a fierce spiritual conflict that only the saved experience. The non-Christian can experience a struggle with the conscience, but only the Christian struggles with indwelling sin. The struggle at times becomes so intense the believer cannot do for God what he wants to do for Him. This, however, does not mean the Christian always suffers defeat, for many times he experiences real victory, but he is always in the battle of conflict.

This struggle is normal Christian experience and is the greatest proof we are really saved and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. If you experience this conflict, rejoice for it is proof of your salvation.

THE DISCOVERY OF INDWELLING SIN (Romans 7:14-25)

Paul - Saved or Unsaved? [see Chart #2]

The Issue in Romans 7:14-25

The word “I” occur 25 times, “sin” 5 times, and “law” 6 times. This whole section is in the present tense, so it was something Paul was experiencing even as he was writing.

Paul is a regenerated man who loved the moral requirements of the Mosaic Law. He had a desire and a longing to keep the spiritual demands of the Law, but he found he could not keep the righteous standards of the Law because of sin in his own life. He wanted to keep God’s law but did not have the power in himself to defeat sin in his life.

God used the Mosaic Law to point out Paul’s sinfulness so as to bring him to an end of himself and to self-effort and cause him to trust Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit for deliverance from sin.

The Conflict in Romans 7:14-25 *“We know that the law is spiritual but I am unspiritual (carnal, fleshy), sold as a slave to sin.”* Paul realized the Law was holy and he was unholy. The word “unspiritual” (fleshy) means a weakness towards sin because of the sin nature.

“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.” It was Paul’s earnest desire as a saved man to keep the righteous demands of the Law, but he found he could not put into practice what he desired. The very sin he hated, he found himself doing if not by overt acts at least in the mind. The mind is where most of the struggle takes place.

“As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.” Paul realized the sin nature was a subtle force which was constantly working on him to cause him to sin and not to do the things of God. He ran headlong into the problem of sin and how to control it in his life. What Paul discovered was that he was not only sinful but helpless because of indwelling sin. It is a terrible awakening to become convicted, not of our sins as we were when converted, but of indwelling sin, a hateful power that seems one’s very self, but is really the sin nature.

“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.” Paul desired the good of the Law but he could not in himself meet the requirements of the Law. Why? Because of indwelling sin. Paul had to learn he needed divine intervention if the power of sin in his life was to be broken. He had to be taught he was powerless to produce righteousness in himself. Before he could appropriate a Savior for indwelling sin, he had to be shown he was sinful. No one ever cries out for deliverance until he sees his own wretchedness before a holy God.

“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. 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.” Paul found a constant conflict of desires, for as a saved man, he desired to keep the Law but still found no power to carry out these desires. The problem was not with the Law but with Paul, who still had indwelling sin in him.

A failure to recognize indwelling sin after conversion can actually cause emotional and mental problems. Many sincere Christians who were wrongly taught sinless perfectionism after conversion or that they could reach a high level of victorious living in which there is no conflict with sin, have made shipwreck of their lives because they failed to understand the mighty conflict which takes place in every true Christian. This conflict is normal Christian experience to teach the believer to depend on the Holy Spirit.

“So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.” Paul discovered the law or principle of evil (sin nature). When he desired to do the good of the Law, he found the sin principle opposed him.

“For in my inner being I delight in God’s law.” The inner being is the inmost personality of Paul which was influenced by the new nature. Paul loved and respected the Law because it was reflection of God’s holy character.

“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.” Paul discovered the law or principle of indwelling sin and it was constantly warring against the law or principle of his mind (new nature). The sin nature was constantly trying to bring Paul into captivity to sin. The Christian must learn to depend upon Jesus Christ through the power of the indwelling Spirit so as to keep the sin nature from raising its ugly head and gaining dominance over him.

After the conflict of Romans 7, the Apostle Paul wrote Romans 8:1: *“Therefore, there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.”* No matter how much the Christian struggles, no matter how great the conflict with sin, there is no eternal judgment for the Christian because Christ died for all the Christian’s sins and fulfilled the requirements of the Law for him (Rom. 8:2-4).

“What a wretched man I am: Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!” Paul hated his sin but now disavows any self-effort to conquer it. Only when Paul came to the end of all self-effort for sanctification does he cry out for deliverance. Paul wanted to know “who” would deliver him, for he realized that progressive victory over sin rests with a person and not with a program or a system. He was not asking how to deliver himself but he was asking for a deliverer.

Paul also asked *“who will deliver me”* so he must have been thinking of glorification as well as sanctification. He knew there was progressive deliverance for those who laid hold of Christ in this life, and there was final deliverance when one went home to glory with Christ. The victory is in Christ and

those who learn to lay hold of Christ by faith will experience victory in degrees in time and complete victory in eternity.

The answer for deliverance from the power of sin is found not in the Law, not in self-effort, not in rigid legalism, but in a life occupied with Jesus Christ.

“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.” Paul resigned himself to the fact there would always be a conflict in his life as a Christian. This does not mean Paul was constantly defeated for he would progress on in his Christian life and experience many victories in Christ. Yet, there would always be conflict. He knew there was victory in Christ but not apart from conflict. [see Chart #3]

As long as we are in this human body of sin, our actions will be a mixture of good and evil, for no man is yet perfectly sanctified. However, we can experience progressive victory over sin as we cast ourselves on Jesus Christ for deliverance.