



TALKS FOR GROWING CHRISTIANS TRANSCRIPT

Inward Struggle Romans 7:14-20

"For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. ¹⁵ For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. ¹⁶ If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. ¹⁷ But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. ¹⁸ For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. ¹⁹ For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. ²⁰ Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me."

Background Notes

The big question about Romans 7:14-20: Was Paul describing his present experience of internal struggle as a believer, or was he describing his former struggle with sin as an unbeliever? Both the context and the argument of the book of Romans seem to indicate that this was Paul's own personal present experience as a believer.

We've seen from Roman 5 on that Paul was moving from the subject of **becoming** a Christian to **being** a Christian. Remember, Romans 5:1 began with "having been justified by faith," and then proceeded to list some of the blessings and benefits of being a Christian. In Romans 6, where we learn of our spiritual position in Christ, the overall context concerns were sanctification, the process of being more conformed to the image of Christ. Sanctification is truth for the believer, not the unbeliever.

As we move into Romans 7 and learn about our freedom from the Law, the overall subject of the sanctification of the believer continues. The reason that the Law is mentioned in this context is to show that sanctification of the believer is not accomplished through keeping the Law. I think a lot of Christians are confused on this point. Some Christians have the idea that, "Okay, I know I'm not saved through keeping the Law, but now that I've become a Christian my goal in life or my aim in life is to try with all my might to keep the Ten Commandments." Wrong! That's distortion. That should not be our aim in life as believers. Our aim should be to love and serve the Lord! The Law is good, and God had a purpose in giving the Law, but the sanctification of the believer is not one of those purposes.

We've seen that one of the purposes of the Law is to expose our sinful natures, and show us how sinful we really are. From other Scriptures we know that when we become Christians we receive a new nature, something brand new -- a divine nature. In 2 Peter 1:4 we read that we as believers are "*partakers of the divine nature.*" But even as believers, we still have that old sinful nature, or flesh, or indwelling sin. That's why we read in Scriptures such as Galatians 5:16 "*I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.*" So even as believers, there's going to be an internal struggle -- because of the flesh, or indwelling sin - this sinful nature that we still have. In fact, it's precisely because we are

believers and we now have the new life in Christ that our internal struggle and tension is magnified! I can think of all kinds of sins that wouldn't bother me in the slightest if I were not a Christian -- can't you? I think that we all can identify here!

So, before the apostle Paul goes on to Romans 8 where he will give us the key for victory, here in chapter 7 we believe that Paul was describing his present experience – the experience of every believer, including himself, apart from the power of the Holy Spirit. Notice that he used the present tense all the way through the passage – not the past tense. He would have been more likely to use the past tense if he had been describing his former experience as an unbeliever.

Now don't get the idea that Paul was leading a life of sin when he said, for example, in verse 19: *"For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice."* Don't get the idea here that Paul was a constant failure, or immobilized from serving the Lord because of sin -- no! The point here is that Paul was quite aware of the reason why he was not free from temptation or sin – there's an internal tension that still exists in the believer because of indwelling sin or the sinful nature. I think that we can all identify with this, can we not? Let's not fool ourselves -- we all can identify with these verses that we've read in Romans 7.

Doctrinal / Teaching Points

1. The sinful nature in the believer is not removed in this lifetime.

Verses 14-17 *"For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. ¹⁵ For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. ¹⁶ If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. ¹⁷ But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. ¹⁸ For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find."*

Why couldn't Paul, as a Christian, be perfect and always do what he would have liked to do for the glory of God? Well, he tells us the root of the problem in verse 17: **"the sin that dwells in me..."** Note that he used the **present tense**.

The same is true in our lives. Why don't we Christians think nice thoughts all the time -- the way we should think, and the way we would like to think? Answer: It's because of indwelling sin, or the sinful nature. All humans are born with a sinful nature, and the sinful nature in the believer is not removed or eliminated in this lifetime. Our sinful natures will be eliminated in the future when we get to heaven and have our resurrected bodies -- how many are glad about that? In heaven, we won't have to worry about sinful thoughts or temptation or struggling with any tendency to sin. No sinful nature then! Praise the Lord! The sinful flesh will be gone forever – indwelling sin will be no more. But right now the tension is there. We must all admit it, because the Bible teaches that the sinful nature in the believer is not removed in this lifetime.

2. The sinful nature in the believer is not reformed in this lifetime.

The sinful nature in the believer is not reformed in this lifetime. Verse 18: *"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to*

perform what is good I do not find." Remember, the **flesh** is another term for the **sinful nature** or indwelling sin.

Now notice what Paul **does not** say. He doesn't say, "For I know that in me, a little good dwells in my flesh now that I'm a Christian." He doesn't say that, does he? And he doesn't say, "For I know that in me, as I mature as a believer, my flesh will get better." He doesn't say that. No! The apostle says that **nothing good** dwells in my flesh! *"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find."*

The sinful nature in a believer is not **reformed** during the course of this lifetime. A lot of Christians get discouraged at this point because they don't understand this truth. They think that somehow the flesh is reformed when we become Christians and with a "reformed flesh" we can begin to have victory over sin and temptation. No! That's like casting your anchor inside the ship! (Everyone follows that illustration, right?) **The sinful nature is never reformed.** The sinful nature, or indwelling sin, is as evil today as it was when you were an unbeliever. The sinful nature is as evil in the mature believer as in the carnal believer. The sinful nature is never reformed in this lifetime -- but when we have our resurrected bodies, we will finally be done with it.

But what about this lifetime? Is there no hope then? Yes, there is hope! When you became a Christian you were born again -- that is, you were given **brand new life in Christ**. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."* Although the old sinful nature remains, we now have new life in Christ. The solution to the problem of indwelling sin is to let the Holy Spirit enable and empower the new life that we have in Christ. That's what Romans 8 is all about. We'll get there, but right now, recognize that until we get to heaven, we still have a sinful nature, and the sinful nature in the believer is not reformed in this lifetime.

Practical Application

Don't kid yourself into thinking that you do not have a problem with sin!

How many Christians can identify with the experience of internal struggle that Paul described here in Romans 7? If you can't identify with the apostle Paul, you're only kidding yourself. You have either too low a view of God's holiness or you have too high of a view of yourself!

I have met people who claim that they have become sinless. They take Romans 7 out of context and say that Paul was describing his experience as an unbeliever. Or they may say that Paul was describing a hypothetical experience that he would have had if he hadn't been a spiritual Christian. These people actually kid themselves into thinking that they no longer have a sinful nature. In fact, there are books in Christian bookstores these days that push this incorrect teaching.

Several years ago a man actually told me that he no longer sinned. He proceeded to tell me all that he was doing for the Lord and how much time he prayed, etc. etc. Well -- what about the sin of religious pride? He was so blinded that he couldn't see my point! He didn't have a good answer when I showed him 1 John 1:8-10: *"If we say that we have no sin, we*

deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us." And these verses in 1 John are addressed to **believers**, not unbelievers!

In Romans 7, the apostle Paul tells it like it is. Don't kid yourself into thinking that you do not have a problem with sin!