

Romans (7:14-25)

Divided I Stand

Part 26 – February 13, 2005

CONFESSION OF FRUSTRATION

Paul has offered us some amazing truths concerning the Spirit-filled believer's relationship with God's Law.

Like an emancipated slave, we're free from the Law's oppressive authority to determine, establish, or maintain our union with God.

Like a mistreated wife with a new, loving husband, we now have a motive and a desire to do the things of the Law to express love.

Sin can no longer exploit our natural reflexive rebellion to being told what to do, and to being scrutinized by the Law. By letting Jesus take the "driver's seat" we don't have to worry about "the cop following us" ... Jesus will be scrutinize, not me.

We can rest in the joy that comes from knowing that we're free, loved, accepted, forgiven, and we're growing into his likeness.

Q: So, why do you continue to struggle with sin?

Q: What keeps us from *complete* victory over sin?

- This is right where Paul picks up the conversation.

Q: Ever made a promise to Jesus and then broke it?

Q: Ever feel like you're sabotaging your own *walk*?

Q: Ever think: I'll never be as spiritual as *them*?

Before you come down too hard on yourself, let's let Paul speak to us, by speaking through us:

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. – Romans 7:14-16 NIV

Paul is just beginning his candid *confession of frustration*. This is one of the easiest passages for me to identify with. If you don't fall in love with Paul today, there is no hope!

RE-ENSLAVED

It's interesting that Paul turns back to his slave analogy:

- "I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin"

Paul sees the believer turning back to sin as tragic as the emancipated slave being re-sold to the slave master. But this time, who is doing the selling of Paul? Paul himself!

Whether we're dealing with a Christian who just won't let go of certain sinful behavior, or a believer who returns to an old habit, it isn't the devil that makes us do it! We sell ourselves out when we're mastered by sin. We're like our own Benedict Arnold ... and it's not rational!

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. – Romans 7:15-16

It's not the *doing* (what he does not want to do) that agrees that the Law is good; it's the desiring *not* to do it that does. Our failure and our conscience reveal the truth of the Law.

DR. JEKYLL & MR. HYDE

As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. 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. 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. – Romans 7:17-20 NIV

Q: What could be more disturbing than realizing that a creature, bent on your destruction, is living inside you? Think *Aliens*!

Paul proposes a startling reality: believers have two natures:

1. The Old Man (from Adam's fall)
2. The New Man (from Jesus' rise)

And these two natures are in constant conflict. Do you ever feel like a Dr.-Jekyll-and-Mr.-Hyde Christian? I love this anonymous quote: When I became a believer, I thought I had drowned the old man in me ... but the rascal knew how to swim!

- My new nature truly desires to please the Lord.
- My old nature only desires to please the flesh.

Q: Now, James warns us (1:6-8) that as believers we shouldn't be *double-minded*; so what's the difference?

A double-minded person *desires* to be a Christian when it's convenient, and *desires* to be worldly when it's expedient. Paul says that even though "I have the desire to do what is good" my spirit has to conquer my flesh to accomplish it.

- Paul isn't *double-minded* he's divided: old nature vs. new!

A CONSTANT BATTLE

So I find this law at work: When 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 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. – Romans 7:21-23 NIV

There's a spiritual war raging within every believer. Paul isn't saying we should live in defeat, accept our sin, and make peace with it; he's telling us to realize we're at war!

- Sometimes we get too cozy with our sin.
- It is out to capture and imprison you!

Q: Has your old nature ever ambushed you?

At the mall, feelin' happy, feelin' blessed; and then that *idiot* sales-clerk does that rude thing. And, WHOOMP! There it is!

The old nature is like a pile of smoldering coals. There may not be a flame, but there's a lot of heat left in 'em. And they're just sitting there waiting for the right conditions: a little oxygen, some combustible material ... and, WHOOMP! It can't be extinguished so it's gotta be deprived. Don't get close to those coals or flirt with that flame!

AGONIZING OVER SIN

Q: So, if I'm going to battle sin, how do I know I'm saved?

A: Simple. True believers agonize over their lingering sin.

Sin against God doesn't really seem to bother unbelievers or counterfeit Christians. Casually and carelessly they profane his name, and violate his holiness, and disobey his commands.

- The only people who don't struggle with sin are the lost.

True believers are frustrated by their unkind words, ungodly behavior, unwise decisions, and immoral thoughts. They're bewildered and befuddled by their own behavior. This is what's so breathtaking about today's passage. Paul (who wrote so much of the NT) in being so unbelievably transparent is letting us know that perfection just isn't an option.

It's my brokenness that authenticates my faith. As long as that brokenness serves to drive us back to God's grace, so we give it to him, and get back in the battle.

DEAD MAN HANGING

You're a fire-fighter in a burning building and you're tethered to man you're pulling up to safety. There's an explosion, and he's killed ... and his dead weight pulls you toward the edge. The rope can't be untied, it's digging into your hands; you could just jump over the edge and get it over with.

But you dig in your heels and back away. The rope cinches around your waist; you can barely breathe. You can jump. But you keep pulling. Your back feels like it's going to snap, your hands are bleeding, you're choking on smoke; but you picture your children, your spouse, and you pray. Suddenly, you get a second wind, adrenaline shoots through you, and up and over comes that dead body, and you're safe.

What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? 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. – Romans 7:24-25 NIV

The issue isn't which excessive or distorted transgressions you commit, it's whether or not you:

- A. Cry out in your weakness (what a wretched I am!).
- B. Look to Jesus Christ as your only hope of rescue.
- C. Repent and revel in his pardon and his provision.
- D. And keep on fighting with the power he gives you.

There's a big difference between a soldier who experiences setbacks and defeats while fighting to victory, and one who simply surrenders ... or a "divided man" and a deserter.

And the battle *never* ends until we're physically rescued from this body. Know why? Because as we grow and conquer, we sin less but become more aware of lesser sins we once ignored. So we battle more and more with less and less.

And always the choice is the same, give up and jump in, or feel the full weight of that dead-man-hanging and fight!