

Freedom In Christ

10/20/24

Sometimes, conflict is not fun. Two years ago, I received a call as I was working the afternoon and evening shift for a family dispute at one of the pavilions at the park. When I arrived, the one group had already left – luckily. This group was the motorcycle group of the family. The other side of the family contained the oldest family members and they got upset with the loud motorcycle sound the younger people were creating by revving their bikes. So, both sides got into a yelling match and many threats were made. Even though the other group had left, you could still feel the tension in the air. You had the old group who thought the young ones were rude and disrespectful to those who had their hearing aids blown out and they were right. The gentleman who rented the pavilion told me he'll never do a family outing again. He wanted to avoid the conflict. We don't like conflict. We try to avoid it as much as possible. We see a vehicle incident up the road we're driving on, we'll turn down a side road to avoid the incident. We're all sick of the political conflict that is going on around us. Can we last till November 5th? At times, there are conflicts we just can't avoid. Paul talks about a conflict that we can't avoid and that deals with what goes on within ourselves. We've been talking about Paul for the past few weeks about how his letter to the followers of Jesus in Rome has the basic ground work for our relationship with the Lord. Let's take a look at the conflict Paul talks about in Romans 7: 14 – 8:2. We read this:

¹⁴ For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. ¹⁵ For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶ Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. ¹⁷ So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

²¹ So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. ²² For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, ²³ but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. ²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body

of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

Life in the Spirit

8 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.^[a] ² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you^[b] free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. (ESV - Biblegateway)

Paul starts by telling us we must acknowledge the inner conflict we experience as human beings. An inner conflict is harder to deal with since we can't hold it or see it. We can feel it, but we're so limited in being able to control this conflict. Paul starts by saying how good the law is for us. In fact, Paul calls it spiritual in verse 14. God gave the law in the Old Testament as a guide, as a manifestation of His best plan for His people. As usual, His law was either used to win His favor or used as a weapon against those who did not keep it and Paul would know all about this. Paul used to be a Pharisee. They were men who made sure the Jews followed all God laws and the laws they added to make the God laws harder to follow. Paul knew God's basic laws were good. They were made to help us. However, these laws cause a conflict within us. It starts off we try to follow the law of God because we know it's good for us, but this is where the conflict begins. Paul tells us we try to do good and want to do good, but something drives us to do the opposite. In verse 17, Paul calls it sin. It is the sin that is within us. Sin that we are born with. Our human nature is sinful. So, our intentions often clash with our actions. Many people today are trying to live a good life and are daily fighting this horrible struggle Paul talks about. In fact, Paul states he is a wretched man because of this conflict. Paul recognizes there is a struggle that happens within us.

Paul sees that we are not good. I had a person some years ago tell me that they were not a bad person because they hadn't killed anyone. In other words, in their eyes, they were good because they hadn't murdered anyone, but they could do other sin and be ok. Paul is saying we should come to the point where at some point we realize we are not as good as we think we are. Paul states in verse 18, "For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. (NIV). We live in a culture where it tries to get around this by saying they have the right to pick what law is good and not good. I tagged a parked vehicle last week at the park that had expired state inspection on their windshield – 2 years expired. The park has an ordinance on vehicles on park property with expired inspection. The owner called into the park and filed a complaint. He shouldn't have gotten a written warning. He can't hunt now. In other words, he's not going to get his vehicle inspected and he's mad that he can't hunt in our parks because

of it even though he had enough money to buy hunting license. Proverbs 26: 4 is so true: When arguing with fools, don't answer their foolish arguments, or you will become as foolish as they are (NLT). They have no respect for the law because they want to keep sinning. We don't want to get to that point. It is so important to get to a point in our life where we realize our sin and know God's law shines light on how wicked we really are compared to the Lord and His righteousness. So, to acknowledge this struggle is crucial for healing. What sin in our lives is making us feel wretched? Is it anger, lust for something, pride, hate, or whatever sin that is causing blockage in our relationship with Jesus? We want to do good, but fail continuously. What can fix this?

Paul stated this in verse 25, "Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!" Then Paul states in Romans 8: 1, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death (NIV)". Paul is telling us that Jesus is the only one who can solve this issue that rages within us. When we allow Jesus into our heart and mind, our past sin is forgiven forever and Paul tells us there is no "condemnation" to those who become true followers of Jesus. If you Google "condemnation", you find this two part definition: the expression of very strong disapproval / the action of condemning someone to a punishment (Oxford). We become liberated from this struggle we have within us about trying to be good, but continue to sin. When we allow Jesus in, all our past sins are forgiven and that "condemnation" is removed. We experience for the first time in our lives true freedom – the freedom from guilt against the Lord. God's expression of very strong disapproval for our sin is removed. Since that past sin is removed, we are saved from the punishment of eternal Hell because of the blood Jesus shed on the cross. Paul adds we are set free from the law when we allow Jesus into our lives. There has to be a time where you ask Jesus to forgive you of your sins.

So, now our human nature or sinful nature has been cleansed from that sin. Since Jesus died on that cross, He has allowed the Spirit of God to move in to take up that void. Now, our human nature should be controlled by His Spirit. We now have God's law within us (our heart) because of His Spirit that lives within us. Our past does not define us; our future in Him does (ChatGPT). This freedom allows us to live with hope and purpose (ChatGPT). We should be thankful for this. Paul wanted the church to realize this costly freedom and to enjoy it.

However, we have to remember we still have a human nature. It is possible for our human nature to be wrenched from the control of the Holy Spirit. Satan does not want us to enjoy this freedom through Jesus so Satan will continually send temptation our way. He'll try to remind us how fun it is to sin or say sin isn't that bad or he'll say Jesus'

grace will continue to cover you even if you keep sinning. Of course Paul already addressed this temptation when he told us earlier in Romans that this is not right thinking. We always have to be on our guard that our human nature doesn't go back to the old way of life.

There is some ways we can keep ourselves on guard. First, we must surrender daily to God's Spirit which guides us. Jesus tells us in Luke 9: 23, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must put aside your selfish ambition, shoulder your cross daily, and follow me (NLT)" This keeps us focused on the new life that we have in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit will keep our new life in Jesus fresh and growing. It'll make sure we stay clear of the human urges to go back to the old way of live we used to live. His Spirit will guide us daily and makes sure we follow Jesus and not this world.

The second item we can do is engage in community. We find this in Hebrews 10: 24, "Think of ways to encourage one another to outbursts of love and good deeds. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of his coming back again is drawing near. (NLT)" We need each other's support. We help those who are new Christians. We help them and remind them how the cost was so great that we don't want to go back to the old ways of life before we knew Jesus. We also pray for each other. This helps us to live out the Christ love we are to have for others. Plus, this love helps us to love the Lord back by wanting to be obedient to His Righteousness or Standards.

The third item is to immerse ourselves in Scripture. Paul tells Timothy in 2 Timothy 3: 16, "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right. It is God's way of preparing us in every way, fully equipped for every good thing God wants us to do. (NLT)" His Spirit within us will allow His Holy Word to realize what sin is and remind us of what sin can do in our lives. Scripture helps us to know what the Lord wants from us. Plus, we realize how much the Lord is willing to help us to live a righteous and holy life on this earth.

Another item that can help us is to cultivate a spirit of gratitude toward God for the victory we have received through Jesus. Because of Jesus, we have overcome our sinful nature. In Psalm 34: 1 – 3 we read, "I will praise the Lord at all times. I will constantly speak his praises. I will boast only in the Lord; let all who are discouraged take heart. Come, let us tell of the Lord's greatness; let us exalt his name together. (NLT)" Doing this everyday will help us to daily surrender ourselves to Jesus. It reminds us of how thankful we are for this great new life that can be found only through Jesus. All these items can help us to stay righteous and holy before our Lord. I leave you with this statement I found:

"In the struggle against our sinful nature, we find hope in the powerful truth of the Gospel. Through Jesus Christ, we are not only forgiven but empowered to live transformed lives. Let us embrace this freedom and walk boldly in the Spirit, overcoming the sin that seeks to ensnare us. Remember, there is no condemnation for those in Christ – only grace, hope, and the promise of new life. (ChatGPT)"

Pray that His Spirit will help you to enjoy this freedom we can find in Jesus Christ and help you to not want to go back to sinful living.

NLT Life Application Study Bible. Tyndale House Publishers: Wheaton, 1996.