

ETHAN TEMPLE MINISTRIES TOOLS FOR LIFE

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THE CHRISTIAN'S STRUGGLE

I titled today's devotional, "The Christian's Struggle," because the non-believer doesn't have the struggle that the Christian has. The unconverted man doesn't have the Spirit of God and is controlled only by his carnal mind. According to Paul, the carnal mind is "enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7). The non-Christian does not obey rules or laws because God has put it in his heart to do so. He obeys for personal, selfish reasons, because of social pressure, etc. Or perhaps he was raised in a principled home and has a conscience that leads him to live a respectable life.

The Christian, on the other hand, obeys God because the Spirit of God has put the desire to obey in his heart:

"But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you" (Rom. 6:17).

The born again individual very much wants to carry out God's will in his life. Paul calls this delighting "in the law of God after the inward man" (Rom. 7:22). Under the new covenant promise, the Holy Spirit begins writing God's law in his heart and mind:

"For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people" (Heb. 8:8-10).

"Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ

ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart” (2 Cor. 3:3).

However, the new believer discovers very quickly that there is another very strong desire in him – the desire for sin. Now that he has the Spirit of God, he is aware of his sinful desires, whereas before, many of those desires didn't really concern him. So the Christian discovers that there are now two natures residing in him: one that desires to follow sin, and the other that desires to obey God. Paul very clearly describes this intense conflict, experienced by every Christian, in Romans 7:14-25:

“For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.”

Every Christian can identify with the struggle Paul describes. Christians often experience this struggle day after day, month after month, and year after year, and never obtain the victory they want to have over sin. Every Christian is well aware of the fact that there is a “law of sin” dwelling within them that is waging war against the God-given desire to obey His law. As Paul states, he delighted in God's law. He very much wanted to obey God in all things; however, he found that it was impossible for him to do so. His sinful nature constantly sought to make him a slave to the law of sin.

Recognizing the impossibility of obeying God because of the power of sin in his life, Paul cries out, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” He then declares that deliverance from the law of sin can happen “through Jesus Christ our Lord” (verses 24, 25, NIV).

In Romans 8:1-4, Paul gives the solution to this problem in the believer’s life:

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”

The solution to the Christian’s dilemma is to allow Christ Jesus, through the law of the Spirit of life, to set us free from the law of sin and death. Put another way, we must let Jesus live out his life in us through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This is what Paul calls “walking in the Spirit.” He further elaborates on this in his letter to the Galatians:

“This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would” (Gal. 5:16, 17).

Paul tells us that the righteous requirements of the law will be fulfilled “in us” when we have Jesus living in us through the baptism of the Holy Spirit:

“That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom. 8:4).

Personal Reflection and Discussion

What is the difference between the Christian's and non-Christian's heartfelt attitude toward sin?

How does Paul describe the Christian's struggle with sin?

What does Paul say is the solution to the Christian's struggle with sin?

What has been your experience with your personal struggle with sin.

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