

17. O wretched man that I am!

August 3, 2008

Wouldn't it be great if everything went our way all the time?

For the ladies, all the make-ups and hair get done perfectly the way you want in less than a minute everyday, and you stand in front of your closet and pull out one set of clothes and you are completely satisfied because you look absolutely stunning and matching from hair style to your pedicured toenails.

For you husbands, your wife never gives a honey-do-list, because they are all done somehow by somebody without paying them before she even think about it. You can watch all the football, basketball and baseball games without an interruption. Did I mention none of you have to work out or diet because you are in a tip top shape all the time like day time soap opera stars and you can eat anything you want without worrying about having a donut tube around your tummy?

For you teenagers, you can sleep and be on the phone all day long, skip school if you want to and you still get 'A's on report cards and you are the most popular kid in the school, no matter what you do. Of course, absolutely no chores. For you younger children, you can have all the sweets you want without mom getting upset with you.

Here is a word of wisdom for you, "Wake up from your daydream." Let's face it, life ain't that easy. As a matter of fact, it is a struggle most of the time. The Christian life is far more of a struggle than ever before, because we have to deal with our own carnal desires that want to do everything against what the Lord wants.

Some biblical commentators say that chapter 7 is the low point of Paul and the Book of Romans. But in my opinion, it is one of the high points of the Book, because it leads to the grand climax of the Book, chapter 8, but also it gives comfort to all of us that even apostle Paul struggled with his own sins especially after reading chapter 6 which tells that the wages of our sin is death.

A. FREEDOM FROM THE LAW

Romans 7:1-6 Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? 2 For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. 3 So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man. 4 Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another--to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. 5 For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. 6 But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.

Once we put our faith in Him, our salvation is secure. God has declared us righteous on account of His Son. Our justification is complete. But our sanctification, however, is ongoing. As we grow in our faith, sin is always there trying to take us

back with constant and never-ending temptations. Even though sin can never again own or master us, it can certainly influence us. It can even convince us from time to time to try living for ourselves instead of for Christ.

This time, apostle Paul uses a marriage to illustrate our freedom from the law. As many of us recited that famous phrase during our wedding ceremony, nothing should take husband and wife apart except death. However, Paul is not discussing marriage and divorce here.

In marriage, death changes our obligations – both in marriage and in our relationship to the law. This doesn't mean that the law has no value for the Christian.

When we trusted Christ, we died to the law. But in Christ, we arose from the dead and now are "united" to Christ to live a new kind of life.

Over all, it sounds like the law itself is faulty in some way. If that is the case, there is something lacking in the God who gave it. Anticipating this question, apostle Paul next defends the character of the law and explains its purpose.

B. OUR PROBLEM WITH GOD'S PERFECT LAW

Romans 7:7-13 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet." 8 But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead. 9 I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. 10 And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death. 11 For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me. 12 Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good. 13 Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful.

The law is a mirror that reveals the inner man and shows us how dirty we are. Note that Paul did not use murder, stealing, or adultery in his discussion. Rather he uses coveting. This is the last of the Ten Commandments, and it differs from the other nine in that it is an inward attitude, not an outward action. Covetousness leads to the breaking of the other commandments. It is an insidious sin that most people never recognize in their own lives, but God's law reveals it.

Sinners who are not saved by the grace of God do not struggle with their sins. Because that is what they do normally – dog barks, sinner sins. But when a sinner comes to know Jesus as his Savior and Lord, the same sin he used to commit without any problem the day before starts to bother him and no longer wants to do it again. It is because the prompting of the Holy Spirit who now resides in his heart. The law cannot do that, but only the Spirit of Living God can.

2 Corinthians 3:6 who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Paul was honest enough to tell us his own struggle with his sins in this chapter. It is our tendency to think that Christian leaders would not struggle with sins like the rest of us. If you ever have that kind of silly notion about me, please go see my wife.

She can tell you the story after story of my stupidities and struggles. It will take a couple of days for her just to sum up the major highlights of my shortcomings.

I am just like you to worry after I teach you guys not to worry; I get mad at someone when I should extend grace and love; I often run ahead of God when I should wait upon Him. As I am getting older in the Lord, I remember His faithfulness more than ever before. That helps me to get out of worries, bitterness and being an idiot a little easier and sooner than before.

One thing we must not forget is that the church should not be a museum for saints, but a hospital for sinners. We all struggle, we all sin but we are forgiven by God when we confess our sins to Him. The sooner we come to grip with that, the sooner we can be right with the Lord.

How many of you remember a TV show called 'Candid Camera'? If you answered, "Yes," you just dated yourself how old you are. The show involved concealed cameras filming ordinary people being confronted with unusual situations, sometimes involving trick props, such as a desk with drawers that pop open when one is closed or an item with a sign that says, "Do not touch". When the joke was revealed, victims would be told the show's famous catch phrase, "Smile, you're on Candid Camera." Remember, how many people try to touch the item of which sign says, "Do not touch"? Some even look around and make sure nobody is watching them before they touched it.

That is a typical human mentality that comes from its sinful nature. When we are told not to do it, what happen? We want to do it all the more. Once God draws a boundary for us, we are immediately enticed to cross that boundary - which is no fault of God or His boundary, but the fault of our sinful hearts.

The law cannot give life. It can only show the sinner that he is guilty and condemned. This explains why legalistic Christians and churches do not grow and bear spiritual fruit.

I've met some people who are so rigid in living in their idea of holy life that they are unbearable. They are critical and self-righteous. They are quick to judge others and quick to label them as spiritually inferior people. They become self-appointed sin-sniffers to others. I have an advice for them: "Get a life."

The law is not sinful – it is holy, just, and good. It does not tempt people to sin more. Rather our own sinful nature kicks in extra wherever and whenever the law puts up a boundary.

C. EVERYBODY'S INWARD STRUGGLE

Romans 7:14-25 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. 21 I find then a law, that evil is

present with me, the one who wills to do good. 22 For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. 23 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. 24 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 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.

What does it mean that the law is "spiritual"? It means that the law deals with the inner man, the spiritual part of man, as well as with the outer actions. In the original giving of the law in Exodus, the emphasis was on the outward actions. But when Moses restated the law in Deuteronomy, he emphasized the inner quality of the law as it relates to man's heart.

In fact, the more we grow in Christ, the more aware we become of our sin and the more we hate it and want to be rid of it. Remember the prophet Isaiah, who saw a vision of the Lord seated on His throne, surrounded by angels singing His praises? So overcome by his own sinfulness against the splendid holiness of God that all he could say was:

Isaiah 6:5 So I said: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The Lord of hosts."

Paul's new nature and his old nature don't end in despair. It ends in joyful victory. If we depend on the energy of the flesh, we cannot serve God, please God, or do any good thing. But if we yield to the Holy Spirit, then we have the power needed to obey His will. The flesh will never serve the law of God because the flesh is at war with God. But the Spirit can only obey the law of God! Therefore, the secret of doing good is to yield to the Holy Spirit.

V24 is a cry of a desperate man who realized that there is absolutely no way to make himself right with God through the law. Then in v25, we find the same man is rejoicing because of the grace of God through Jesus Christ.

D. APPLICATIONS

1) The only way we can overcome our own carnal desires is to yield to the Holy Spirit.

2) All the biblical knowledge will not do any good unless we obey our Lord's commands.

John 15:10-11 If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. 11 These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.