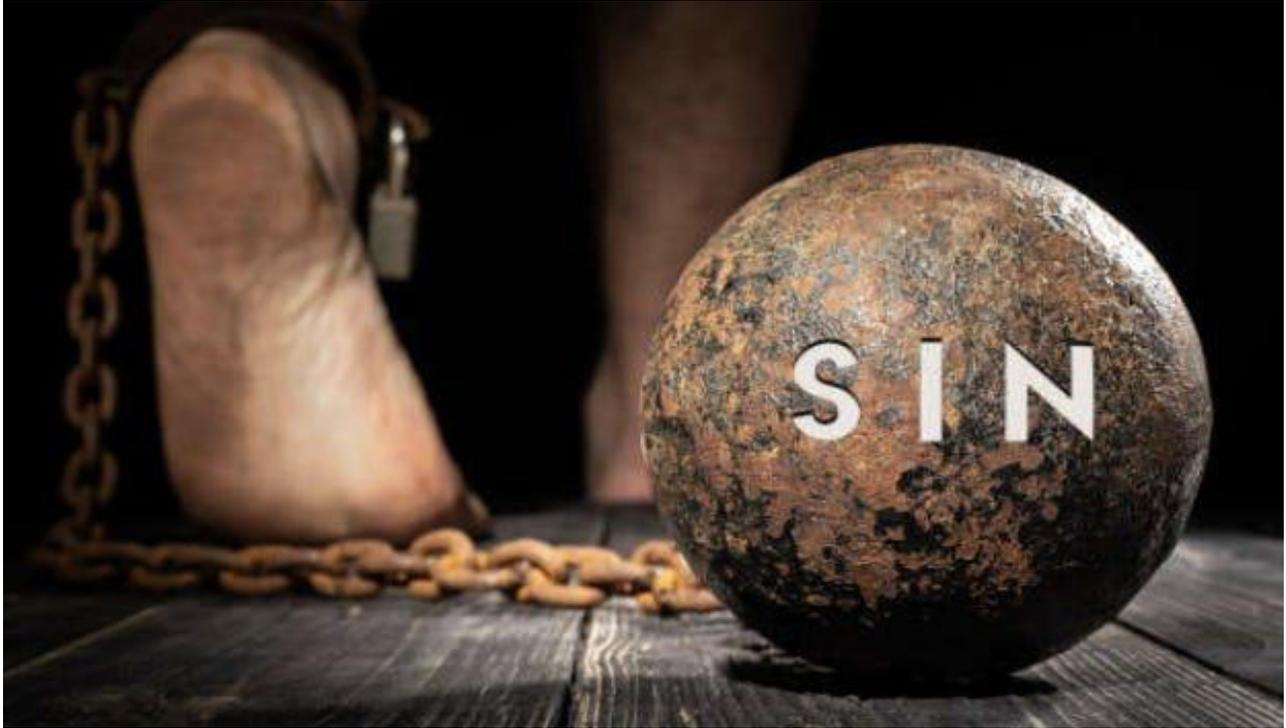


Ministry of Grace Church

Romans 7:19-25 – Sermon Notes Captive to Sin



Background

After the service last week, I was asked a question that, perhaps, we all struggle with. If all of our sins have been paid for, past, present, and future and our sins have been removed from us, as [Psalms 103:12](#) says, “As far as the east is from the west,” then what is [1 John 1:8-9](#) talking about when it says,

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

If all of our sins have been paid for and are covered by the blood so that God does not see them, then why do we have to confess our sins for Him to forgive us and cleanse us from unrighteousness?

Here’s another way of thinking about this. If I were legally adopted by a person who truly loved me then I would be just as much his child as my siblings who were born into the family. If I misbehaved, I would justly receive punishment for it. I would not cease to be his child, but my fellowship with him would be broken

When Jesus died and rose again, His blood paid the legal penalty for all of our sins. Legally, our sins have been cast away from us and cannot be charged to us. So, as a Christian, who has been

legally adopted by God the Father, when I sin, the sin is legally paid for, and it does not affect my sonship with God although it does cause a fellowship issue between us. I am still His child, and He still loves me. But, unless and until we both understand that what I did was wrong, we do not agree with each other, and our fellowship is broken. As a result, chastening may be involved. The purpose of the chastening is to allow me to understand and agree with Him that what I did was not right (I am unrighteous).

The bottom line is this: when a Christian sins, it does not affect him or her legally, but it does affect him or her relationally. We don't cease to be God's child, we don't get unsaved, but we do break our fellowship with Him and that is what is restored by confession.

Last time, we ended with Paul's lament about his inability to remain faithful to God. He said,

Romans 7:19

For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want.

Remember that the word translated "I want," is a reference to his determined will. Paul, like any genuinely saved Christian, was determined to please our Heavenly Father. Likewise, we determine that we will be an obedient child. However, this nasty sin nature that has taken up permanent residence in us refuses to back off. It is constantly prodding us to do what we know is wrong. As a result, we don't simply sin once and then get over it, we disobey repeatedly - over, and over, and over, and over, and over again. Paul now continues on -

Romans 7:20-21

But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one working it out, but sin which dwells in me. I find then the principle that in me evil is present—in me who wants to do good.

The words "working it out" are from the Greek word *katergazomai*, meaning "to work fully, to finish, or to fully accomplish." And, "dwells" is from the word *oikeō*, which means "living somewhere as a permanent resident, as opposed to a temporary resident."

This verse is very similar to verse seventeen, in which Paul identified the sin dwelling in him as the reason that he does things that he hates. He now states something that, to us, has become a very familiar fact. It is the sin (the sin nature) which has taken up permanent residence in him which fully accomplishes that which he has determined not to do.

According to Adam Clarke in his *Commentary on the Bible*, Paul is saying;

My will is against it; my reason and conscience condemn it. But it is the sin that dwells in me - the principle of sin, [the sin nature] which has possessed itself of all my carnal appetites and passions, and thus subjects my reason and domineers over my soul. Thus I am in perpetual contradiction to myself. Two principles are continually contending in me for the mastery: my reason, on which the light of God shines, to show what is evil; and my passions, in which the principle of sin works, to bring forth fruit unto death.

It is this contention between the Spirit of life within us and the sin nature within us that produces the daily battle for all Christians: the wholesome desire to obey and please God, versus the lustful desires of the sin nature that drag us into sin and guilt.

And, unfortunately, we will not leave this battleground until the day we are taken to glory. We need to learn how to do battle effectively and that is by submitting our will to God and learning

repeatedly how to fall to our knees when our sinful tendencies win out over our desire to do good. Remember:

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (I John 1:8, 9)

Also, keep in mind that when he forgives our sins, he removes them from us, as David said in the Psalms:

For as high as the heavens are above the earth, So great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. (Psalms 103:11-12)

Then, in verse 21, Paul says, “I find then the principle that in me evil is present.” So, what does Paul mean by “a principle?” The Greek word is *nomos*, which literally means “a law.” Once again, there has been considerable debate about what he means by this expression. The usual sense of “a law” is something to which we are subject, something that is imposed by a superior, something that binds, controls, or influences us. There are many things we call laws that really aren’t laws; rather they are things that we have learned by observation. We refer, for instance, to such things as the law of gravity, the laws of physics, or the scientific laws of thermodynamics. These are not really laws in the sense that some legislative or ruling body has declared them to be so and has assigned officials to enforce them (unless, of course, you consider them as having been imposed by God Himself).

The law (or principle) that Paul is talking about in the current verse is just such a law. He is saying that he finds an unwritten law which seems to say that badness is constantly present, close at hand, and ready to take over whenever we desire to do what is right and good. And in this verse, once again, we see the word “wants” which is from *thelō*, indicating not just a wish or a desire to do good, but a determination to do good.

Although we have said it before, this is an apt description of our sin nature, our tendency to sin. Whenever we want to do the right thing, when we are determined to be obedient to God and do His will, our sin nature is ever present and ready to lead us into doing the wrong thing instead.

In just a few verses Paul will give a new name to this sin nature, to this “principle” that makes badness ever present when we’re determined to do good. He will call it “the law of sin.”

If I were allowed to vote on this law, I would vote that we repeal it. That would make life a lot easier for all of us!

Romans 7:22-23

For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in my members, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a captive to the law of sin which is in my members.

The word translated here as “I joyfully concur” is *sunēdomai*, which only occurs in this one place in the entire New Testament. It means “to be pleased with” or “to have delight in something.” Paul actually finds delight, that is, inward pleasure, when he obeys the Law of God.

Paul said back in verse twelve that the Law is Holy and that the commandments that make up the law are holy, just, and good. Now he is saying that he actually finds pleasure in the Law. This is

an obvious indication that Paul is “born-again,” for without this conversion, a person cannot find pleasure in obeying God’s Law.

King David expressed a similar sentiment in Psalms 1, where he said:

How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the way of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! **But his delight is in the law of Yahweh, And in His law he meditates day and night.** (Psalms 1:1-2)

The law of God is not something that Christians should be afraid of; it should be a source of joy for us in our innermost being. Paul refers to this innermost being as “the inward man.” Here’s what Albert Barnes said about this expression in his *Notes on the Bible*:

The expression “the inner man” is used sometimes to denote the rational part of man as opposed to the sensual; sometimes the mind as opposed to the body (compare 2Co 4:16; 1Pe 3:4). ... Here it is used evidently in opposition to a carnal and corrupt nature; to the evil passions and desires of the soul in an unrenewed state; to what is called elsewhere “the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts.” (Eph 4:22). The “inner man” is called elsewhere “the new man” (Eph 4:24); and denotes not the mere intellect, or conscience, but is a personification of the principles of action by which a Christian is governed; [it is] the new nature; the holy disposition; the inclination of the heart that is renewed.

So, Paul is saying that he finds inward, intellectual pleasure in obeying God’s Law because of the regenerated spiritual life that God has given him. Unfortunately, as we will see in the next verse, the “old man” is still with us as well and it is in a constant battle with this “new man.”

In verse 21 Paul said that he perceives an unwritten law that brings out evil in him whenever he is determined to do what is right. In verse 22 he said there is another law that he delights in: the Law of God. These are the two forces that are warring within him and in all of us. As we saw in the previous verse, these two forces are the “inner man” (the real “me” on the inside) and the “old man” (the sin nature).

He now goes back to referring to these two opposing forces as laws, calling them the “law of my mind” (the real “me” on the inside) and the “law of sin” (the sin nature). He aptly describes the conflict that occurs between these two as warfare. And you will notice that Paul is astute enough to recognize that this is a warfare that is going on within his body. The two opposing forces have taken up residence in his (and our) physical body. These two opposing forces, these two laws, are at war specifically against each other and the battlefield is within our body.

He also recognizes that the law of sin is taking him captive and making him a prisoner of war. Therefore, Paul is telling us that as the law of his mind, which delights in the Law of God (that is, obedience to God), and the law of sin (the sin nature) clash, the sin nature captures him, leads him away as a captive, and makes him a prisoner of war. In other words, his sin nature gains dominion over him.

I believe that this completely describes the battle that every Christian faces daily. We want to be obedient to God, we are determined to be obedient to our Heavenly Father and to please Him. But instead, we find ourselves succumbing to “the sin which so easily entangles us” as Hebrews 12:1 calls it.

I don’t know about you, but I find that I get almost angry with myself knowing what I should do (what I am determined to do) and, instead, doing what I know I shouldn’t do. As hard as I try, I

can't overcome this enemy, and it makes me feel guilty! Thank goodness for confession. But look! The apostle Paul felt the same way, which is why he said,

Romans 7:24-25

Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.

The Greek word translated “wretched” is *talaipōros*, which refers to someone who is suffering miserably. That’s us in our battle against our sin nature!

As I just said, I get really irritated with myself when I do that which I know God wants me to avoid. It gives me a great sense of guilt that is only alleviated by personal confession and God’s grace. Obviously, the Apostle Paul feels similar. As a result of the battle between his intellect and his sin nature in which his sin nature carries him off as a prisoner of war and controls his actions against his own will, he declares, “**O wretched man that I am!**” Paul wants to be rescued from his body of death.

Our translation here (the Legacy Standard Bible) says “...**the body of this death.**” That is, Paul is using the word “body” to refer to something non-physical (the sin nature). He is saying that his sin nature has such control over him that it is as if his whole body is inhabited by and controlled by his sinful tendencies.

Some commentators suppose that Paul is referring to an ancient custom of tying a dead body to a captive. In this manner the prisoner had to drag the heavy and abhorrent, smelly burden behind him for the lengthy trek back to the homeland of the captor. Although I don’t believe that this was Paul’s intent, it certainly is a vivid picture of the constant burden of our sin nature.

I don’t need to ask you whether you ever feel this way or not. If you are truly a born-again Christian, then you have felt this way. That’s the battle which rages within all Christians as we desire to please God and try to do His will. But this battle frequently ends in defeat when our sin nature sneaks up and takes us captive.

However, this is not a hopeless battle. Let me say that again. This is not a hopeless battle! Paul will begin to explain in the next chapter how we, as sinners saved by grace, can overcome the sin nature and experience personal victory by the grace of God through the blood of Christ!

Paul’s initial conclusion, of this entire battle between his desire to obey God and his tendency to commit sin, is expressed in the current verse. His conclusion is that with his mind, that is, his intellect, Paul serves the Law of God. As he said back in verse 22, he (his “inner man”) delights in obeying the Law of God. The regenerated part of him wants to do God’s will. But with his flesh, that is his “old man” or his sin nature, Paul says he serves the law of sin.

Paul recognizes that the part of him that he has control over is focused on serving God, but the part of himself that he cannot control is a captive slave to sin. Again, let me point out that this does not absolve Paul of the responsibility for his sin. He is still guilty of violating God’s Law and of sinning against God. The difference, as we will see in the next chapter, is that God has provided a way for him (and us) to be free from the condemnation of sin.

That’s why he opens this verse with, “**Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!**” You will notice that it is not Jesus to whom he is thankful, but to God (the Father) and his thanks is through, or by means of, Jesus Christ. Paul recognizes that it is because of what Jesus did for him on the

Cross and by his resurrection from the dead that he is able to be freed from the dominion of his sin nature. By God's grace, the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all unrighteousness. Therefore, he thanks God **through** Jesus Christ. But he doesn't stop there. You will notice that he says "through Jesus Christ **our Lord!**" Paul recognizes that it is through the lordship of Jesus that he is able to overcome the lordship of sin that he is battling. In other words, he recognizes that it is only through submitting his will to Jesus Christ as his Lord and Master that he finally overcomes his slavery to his own sin nature.

So What?

Even though we are in a constant battle with our sin nature, and we frequently lose the battle, we know that through confession our fellowship with God is restored knowing that our sins have been forgiven and sent away from us as far as the east is from the west. May we all learn the necessity of living on our knees!

May we all learn to see the battle that is going on within us. And may we see that even though we are saved through the blood of Christ and we are determined to obey God and do His will, our sin nature keeps dragging us away from Him. May God give us the strength to resist our sin nature and may He give us the desire to submit ourselves completely to Him.

As we said, the law of God is not something that Christians should fear, but we also know that obeying it does not make us holy or righteous. We should feel good when we are obedient to God, but we should also recognize that our sin nature will cause us to break God's law. Thank God for confession and for His grace!

Remember that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from **all** sin! Though "our sins are like **scarlet**," His blood washes them away completely so that we appear to God "as white as snow." And we get that cleansing through confession, daily, hourly, minute-by-minute confession. For He is faithful and righteous to forgive us and to cleanse us – every time!

Now that's grace!

Don't be too hard on yourself because you battle with sinful tendencies and the disobedience to God which follows. It doesn't mean you have lost your salvation. In fact, it is a constant reminder that confession and humility before God are necessities for every Christian. The more we recognize our own sin, the more we have to humble ourselves and draw near to God. Remember, He will ALWAYS forgive our sins when we confess them.

Too often we hear of people who have "accepted" the gift of salvation, the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross to pay for their sins, but they have never really submitted themselves to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Listen, if Jesus is not the Lord of your life, then neither is He your Savior. That's why Peter ended his second letter with:

but grow in the grace and knowledge of our **Lord and Savior** Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (2 Peter 3:18)

Are you submitted to Him and to His will? Is He truly your Lord and Master as well as your Savior?

Let's pray.