

WHEELERSBURG BAPTIST CHURCH

Sunday Morning Message – August 2, 2015

“Understanding the Believer’s Struggle with Indwelling Sin”

Romans 6:1 – 7:25

6 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? **2** By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? **3** Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? **4** We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. **6** We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. **7** For one who has died has been set free from sin. **8** Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. **9** We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. **10** For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. **11** So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. **13** Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. **14** For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

15 What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! **16** Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? **17** But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, **18** and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. **19** I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.

20 For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. **21** But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. **22** But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. **23** For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

7 Or do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives? **2** For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage. **3** Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress.

4 Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. **5** For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. **6** But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

7 What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.” **8** But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. **9** I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. **10** The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. **11** For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. **12** So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

¹³ Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure. 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.

If you are in Christ, then this is true

Chapter 6 verse 2 says you have died to sin; verse 3 says that you been baptized into Christ Jesus and his death; verse 6 says that your old self was crucified with him, and you are no longer enslaved to sin; verses 7&8 state that you died with Christ and therefore are set free from sin; verse 18 says that having been set free from sin, you have now become a slave to righteousness. Finally, verse 22 says you have been set free from sin and have become a slave of God. This is true and amazing.

According to God's Word, this is also true ...

Chapter 7 verse 13 states that sin is producing death in you; verse 14 says you are of the flesh, sold under sin. Verse 15 states that you are confused and do not do what you want to do, but do the very thing you hate. Verse 16 says that sin dwells in you, and verse 18 states nothing good dwells in you. Verse 18 states that you don't have the ability to do what is right, and verse 19 says that you don't do the good you want to do, but you keep doing the evil you don't want to do because, verse 20 sin dwells in you, and verse 21 evil lies close at hand. Verse 23 tells you that you have a law waging war against the good that is in your mind that makes you captive to sin. And that in your flesh you serve the law of sin.

So my dear friends, we are in a quandary. You have a contradiction in your life. I am speaking right now to those of you who are in Christ. You have been set free from sin. Christ died and took the penalty and judgment for your sins on the cross. He died the death you deserved, thus releasing you from God's condemnation and wrath for your sins; all your sins, past, present, and future. So the power of sin over your life was broken when Christ died and rose from the dead. It is a fact. It is finished. So you are dead to sin.

But you all well know that you also struggle with sin that dwells within you. Though you have a deep desire to obey God and live a holy, pure, clean life, though you agree with the Word of God that commands you to love God with your whole self, and others as yourself, though God has changed your deepest desire, in your experience.....you oft times fail and do not live, act, or feel that way at all. You are sometimes selfish, self-centered and still want your own way. Perhaps you hold an inward resentment and hard feelings toward someone. At times you are cold and indifferent to the things of the Lord. You are bored by the Word of God. Though you believe prayer is important and essential, it just doesn't always happen. The thought of sacrificial giving of your time and service to others does not bring joy to your heart, but a sense of overwhelm and even resentment. You have lustful thoughts. Your desires are not pure and clean. You indulge in excesses. Angry words that hurt others come out of your mouth, revealing a heart of anger. Do I need to go on? You have your own list of faults, sins, and ungodly thoughts that weigh you down and discourage you.

So what is going on? It seems that the Scripture teaches a crazy contradiction. So which is true of you? Are you free from sin, or captive to sin? The answer is that both statements are true!!!

In sorting out this seeming contradiction, you will find a pathway to hope and victory in the struggle. Here is a way to begin to make some sense of this confusion.

First, we need to understand that there is a distinction between objective fact and personal experience. Let me give a few examples to help you grasp this paradox:

The example of marriage. Can two people be married and not feel or act married? They quarrel, they don't trust each other, they are not close, they are strangers...yet they are married. Are they? They may not even be living under the same roof. But they are married. What must they do? They must learn how to love each other, to communicate, and to forgive each other so that their experience begins to line up with what is true. They must change their attitudes and actions to line up with the objective commitment they made before God and men.

The example of unsaved good people. Can an unsaved, lost person act and appear to be a good person? I certainly know lost people that appear righteous and do a lot of good things, sometimes more than many professing Christians. So are they good people? They have an appearance of goodness, and demonstrate that goodness by doing beneficial kind things for other people. But the Bible states that all people outside of Christ are corrupt, impure, and wicked and under the judgment of God. So are they good? The appearance and actions are contrary to the reality. Jesus spoke of the hypocrisy of the religious leaders of the day referring to them as white washed tombs full of dead men's bones. They outwardly appeared pure and holy, but inside were spiritually dead and corrupt. Such people in deed may do things that benefit others, but if they are not saved, it is never for the honor of glory of the One who gave them the strength and ability to do those things.

A third example of this distinction is what happened when Abraham Lincoln declared all slaves free and emancipated. Were these slaves truly free? They were. It was an objective legal declaration and fact that they were free and no longer bound to their earthly master. However, it took years for them to learn to think and live as free men and women. Their feelings, thoughts and actions were disjointed from the legal fact that they were liberated from their bondage.

Do you see the paradox? All is not as it seems. Paul states clearly in Romans chapter 6 that those who are in Christ are legally set free from their bondage to sin. However, in the very next chapter, he relates his own inward battle and struggle with the indwelling presence of sin.

Beloved, for us to experience the practical victory over sin, we must understand and accept what is going on. We cannot rely on human psychology and man's ideas to explain these struggles and provide ways to improve ourselves. God has provided a sufficient revelation and the power of the Holy Spirit to enable us to overcome in this battle and struggle.

Here are two unbiblical responses to this issue. Some just resign themselves to the defeat of some besetting sin and give up trying. Such folks may be truly saved, but live defeated, sidelined lives of guilt and condemnation and self-deception. I wonder if many of these people leave this earth prematurely under the chastening hand of their Father. It is a fearful thing to continue in unrepentant sin and disobedience. If this describes you, please reach out to someone in the church for some help. There are biblical solutions and answers to your struggle.

The other extreme is for people to ignore and deny the struggle. They are in a form of denial. They either excuse their actions and attitudes as just understandable weaknesses. They use phrases like "nobody's perfect" and "what I do isn't all that bad".

There is a better way; God's way, to deal with this problem. To deal with this struggle with indwelling sin, we must first get honest with our situation.

I John 1:5-10

⁵This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. ⁶If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Once we confess our sins, then the process of change begins. To better understand that, let's take a closer look at our relationship with sin, first before our new birth, then as a saved person still in an unredeemed body, and finally what it will be in the future when we see the Lord and our salvation is fully experienced.

We are born into this world alienated from God and spiritually dead. We are consumed with our own desires and go our own way. We are sinners by nature (inherited from Adam) and that fallen depraved condition manifests itself as the works of the flesh. As lost people, we practice sinful thoughts and sinful actions. They become entrenched in our thinking and identity. Sin characterizes and contaminates everything we do and think. As a result, we suffer the consequences of living a sinful life.

Ephesians 2:1-3

2 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

Sin was our master. We had no desire for God, His glory or His righteousness. We were His enemies and by nature children of His wrath. We did wrong, and any so-called good work was driven by some form of self-righteousness performed for some purpose other the glory of Jesus Christ. Then God invaded our lives, and while in this lost sinful state, the Holy Spirit brought us to life, called us to Christ, and we were born again. Now being spiritually quickened, we became aware of our wretched state and need for rescue and forgiveness. In our spiritual poverty, we cried out to Jesus Christ and asked Him to become our Lord and save us. We heard the good news that He had died on the cross for sinners, and took our place and suffered the punishment and wrath due us based on our sins. Then he granted us the faith to believe this good news and empowered us to turn away from our sin filled selfish life and surrender to Him as our Lord. When we believed the gospel, the Word of God says that we were immediately justified, declared righteous, fully accepted by the Father, solely based on the sacrifice of His Son on the cross. As we confessed and admitted our sins, we also confessed Jesus as Lord of our lives. All of our sins were forgiven; past present and future, being carried away by Christ, and we were legally set free from our sin and set apart for God and His purposes. As God's child, we were sealed and filled by the Holy Spirit to live a life worthy of this calling.

So here we are. Newborn babes in Christ. We have been granted a new life. We are legally set free from sin and declared righteous. So what about all of those years of sinful behavior and habits? Does all that immediately disappear and go away? Sometimes the Lord does immediately remove old habits when he saves them. But now a process begins – something we call progressive sanctification.

CROSS ARMS ACTIVITY

It is imperative to understand what is happening in this process. This is a process of change. Change is uncomfortable. It doesn't "feel" normal. People often like to stay where they are. God fully accepts us into His kingdom on the basis of Christ, but though he fully accepts us as we are, it is for the purpose of us changing for what we have been into the image of His Son. This means that the old must go, and the new must come and replace the old.

Ephesians 4:17-24

¹⁷ Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. ¹⁹ They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. ²⁰ But that is not the way you learned Christ!—
²¹ assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, ²² to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

This volitional choice to think and act differently will eventually change my feelings. My feelings will eventually line up with my new habits. However, at first, there will often be resistance and a struggle – hence Romans 7. I must continue to submit myself to God's Word (in my thinking and my actions) to bring my feelings into conformity to God's requirements and nature. Don't misunderstand. I'm not left to just pull up my bootstraps and depend on my own willpower and strength. The Lord has not left me alone, but promises His enabling, grace, and power to change. My new nature is ready to do the right thing. In the depth of my soul, I love His law and righteousness. It is this residue of my unredeemed flesh that has been habituated to ungodly habits and desires. That is the source of the battle and struggle. So in reality, it is not the redeemed changed me that wants to do evil, but rather it is the habituated unredeemed flesh (old habits and patterns of thought and action) that is strapped to me. Hence God's Word exhorts me to put off these old habits and actions and put on the new. As I replace the old sinful habits with the new righteous habits, I am being changed from glory to glory and become more like Him. No temptation and sin can withstand His presence, He has broken the power of sin, paid the penalty for that sin, and the glorious hope is that one day all residue of sin will be cast completely away and we will be permanently set free from the presence of sin and temptation – that's called heaven. Unsaved people will be left with their unfulfilled lusts and desires – burning within them, consumed with them forever. My brothers and sisters, please listen carefully and understand. If you are in Christ, you are legally set free from your sin. The penalty for all your sins, past, present, and future has been paid fully by Christ Jesus. You no longer face God's wrath, anger, judgment for those sins. However, your brain and your body has been trained and habituated in unrighteous attitudes and actions. Though you are legally set free from sin, in your thoughts and past practices and experiences, you have a residual indwelling pattern of sin. Within your spirit, you now have a deep desire for holiness and you want to obey the Lord and His commandments. Your new nature loves God, and the Holy Spirit helps you worship and cry out to Him as your Father. You also have a supernatural love for others, especially your brothers and sisters in the church. You have also an insatiable desire for God's Word, like a newborn baby craves his mother's milk. But there is also a sinful residue that resides in your unredeemed body. You are new on the inside, but the body has yet to be changed, and this residual sin must be continually guarded against and battled until the day that we see Him and are completely changed. That is at a future appointed time.

I JOHN 3:1-3

I John 3: See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Beloved, we are God's children

*now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.*³ *And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.*

We have been set free from the penalty of sin, and we are being set free from the power of sin as we are progressively set apart from sin unto God, and when we see Him, our mortal body will be changed and put on immortality, and in that moment when we see our Savior face-to-face, we will be delivered from the very presence of sin. All of the temptation to sin will be gone, and we will be perfect, just like our Savior. What a day that will be, when our Jesus we will see.

But until then, and oh how we long for and anticipate that day, we fight, and struggle, and sometimes fall. But He picks us up, and we learn how to walk in this righteousness. This spiritual growth and repentance happens as our thinking is changed. We behold the holiness and perfection of our God and Savior in His Word. His word acts as a mirror that shows us our imperfections, our remaining corruption, the residue of unclean habits and old patterns of thinking and action. When we see our sin, we confess it and He cleanses it from us. The Spirit empowers us to strip away these old habits, and to replace them with new habits of righteousness and holiness in line with our new nature and desires. This process requires us to humble ourselves and draw close to our Savior. We need His help and abiding presence to change and rid ourselves of this uncleanness. But my brothers and sisters, it is only because our Savior bore our sins and broke the power of that sin, that we are granted access and welcome into His very holy presence to get the help and grace we need to change.

Hebrews 12:1-3

*12 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,*² *looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*³ *Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.*

Finally let's take one last look at our passage in Romans 6. Verse 4 says that we can walk in a newness of life. Verse 11 says that we must consider ourselves to be dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus, and not allow this sin to rule and make us subservient. The Lord will actually use the same body that was previously dominated and ruled by our sin as an instrument of righteousness. The key to this victory is in believing what is factually true, even if it feels unfamiliar and uncomfortable. It is learning how to walk by faith in God's promises and not by what we feel. We must humbly present our bodies to God as a slave for righteous acts and attitudes. The result is that we more and more will be set aside and used by Him for His righteous purposes. This is the reason He saves us, to use our lives for His glory. None of this is easy, but it is possible!! It is a continual, progressive process that will not end until we see Him and we are delivered from the very presence of sin. Until then, we must fight the good fight, looking to Him for the grace and strength to prevail and persevere and endure.

It is a deception to believe that the Christian life is easy and a bed of roses. The struggle is there because you are saved. Even though we struggle, our lives are also filled with joy and a deep gratitude and satisfaction as we live each day in the light of cross and love for us. Though we slip and fall when we move away from dependence on Him, He lovingly and mercifully forgives us and keeps us safe. Our God is jealous for His own glory and promotion, and He will not allow us to glory in our own strength. It is our weakness and dependence on Him and in receiving His help and grace through His church, His word, and His presence that we prevail.

But please hear this and let it go deep into your hearts and minds. In our struggles, and even in our failure and sin, we are never forsaken or cast out. He remains faithful and true, not because we deserve it, but because He died to provide it.

So I'll ask you one last time, are you free from sin? Absolutely! And you are learning every day how to experience that deliverance.