
A real struggle with sin

I want to share something with you this morning that I really struggle with and that is Sin.

Bro Dennis Gillett once said, “I cling tenaciously to the belief that I am normal”, I too am hoping that I’m normal – well . . . it might be debatable . . . but I know that I am not alone in this. When the Pharisees brought the woman caught in adultery to Jesus, he said, OK the person who is without sin, they can throw the first stone, and when he looked up after writing in the sand with his finger, everyone but the woman was gone. Just like the Pharisees and the woman, we are all sinners.

I also know as a sinner I am in good company with our brother Paul. I can really relate to what he said, when he said, “I don’t really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don’t do it. Instead, I do what I hate. . . . And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can’t. I want to do what is good, but I don’t. I don’t want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love God’s law with all my heart. But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death?” Romans 7:14-25 (NLT)

Affinity with Paul

I feel the same way as Paul did and I often can’t see my way past the fact that as God said in Jeremiah, my human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is? (Jer 17:9) The problem is, how do I get from the fact that my heart is desperately wicked, from this fight that Paul so eloquently talks to us about in Romans 7 to where Jesus asks me to be perfect, even as our Father in heaven is perfect? (Matt 5:48).

I think my focus is all wrong. I’m focusing on the failure in my life when I should be focussing on thanking God that the answer to this dilemma is in Jesus Christ our Lord and his power to save. You see, Romans 7 is not the end of the story, it merely lays out the problem, Romans 8 however provides the solution. I want to live in Romans 8 which is about freedom from the power of sin and not Romans 7 which is all about our struggles with sin!

Paul gives us the answer in Romans 8:1-4

“So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death. The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature. So, God did what the law could not do. He sent His own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin’s control over us by giving His Son as a sacrifice for our sins.”

In the rest of the of the chapter Paul provides us with a comparison of a life dominated by our sinful nature vs a life controlled by the Spirit of Life. Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. So, letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace. For the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did

obey God's laws, and it never will. That's why those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God.

Controlled by the Spirit

But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you. And Christ lives within you, so even though your body will die because of sin, the Spirit gives you life because you have been made right with God.

You have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves, but rather you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children . . . And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory.

Summary:

Sinful nature	Life-giving spirit
Thinks about sinful things	Think about things that please the spirit
Leads to death	Life and Peace
Hostile towards God & can never please God	
Die	Live
Fearful slave	Adopted as children, heirs of God's glory

Now my heart desperately wants to believe this and for my life to be controlled by the Spirit of Life, but my head says how... How do I fight the good fight? How do I run with endurance the race set before me? Will I ever be able to say: "I have kept the faith. There is a crown of righteousness in store for me."?

HOW... How do I live a life controlled by the spirit of life and not by sinful nature?

David's wisdom

Perhaps we can start by looking to David who had the same dilemma and see how he coped with it? In Psalm 24 David says "only those with clean hands and a pure heart can stand in God's holy place." And in Psalm 119 he explains the process of how have clean hands and a pure heart, In Psalm 119 he says, "How can you keep your way pure?"

- By living according to God's word
- Seeking God with his whole heart
- Asking God to help him us not to stray from his commands
- By hiding God's word in our hearts so that we might not sin against God.
- Rejoices and delighting in following God's commands (it's not a burden)
- Meditating on God's words and reflecting on His ways
- And in summary David says - "I will not neglect Your word"

God's word keeps us on the path of purity because it changes what we love. We will love the wrong things if our minds aren't filled with God's truth. Our sin and our Bible cannot co-exist for long: either the Scriptures will keep us from sin, or sin will keep us from the Scriptures. We need to store up spiritual truths in our hearts so that when we are struggling and not thinking clearly, we have verses that we can hold onto for strength and comfort.

Constantly thinking of Scripture

Every time Jesus was tempted to sin in the wilderness, he quoted a verse to help himself overcome. If this is the example that Jesus gave us, then surely, we should use the same method?

Jesus also warns us that a good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. What you say flows from what is in your heart. There is a very clear implication here from Jesus in terms of what he thinks we should fill our hearts with.

How?

So, one very clear aspect of the HOW, of How we deal with sin, is to fill our hearts and minds with God's word, by reading, memorising, meditating and talking one to another about God.

Another important part of the HOW, is to pray. We saw David said it was part of the process to keep our way pure. God says through Jeremiah: "When you pray, I will listen. If you look for Me with your whole heart, you will find Me and I will be found by you," Jer 29:12. Jesus tells us to pray. He said, "Pray that you may not fall into temptation," ([Matt. 26:41](#)).

It is very difficult to look at sin if we are on your face in prayer like Jesus was in the garden of Gethsemane. When temptation calls, our first response should be to cry to God for help because we really can't do this on our own.

We should also pray when we are in sin

We often pray to be kept from sin and temptation, we sometimes pray when sin is at the door and temptation is calling and we often pray after our sin to be forgiven, but how often do we pray while we are in our sin? It would certainly be the hardest time to pray, but surely this may be the most important time to pray for help when we have already fallen into sin.

Paul said, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." God will help us out of our sin. We also need to pray for a heart that hates sin and hungers for holiness. David begged, "Create in me a pure heart, O God and renew a loyal spirit within me" and Peter re-iterated "for the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

So back to the HOW - we also need to repent of our sins

The first very important part of repentance is naming the sin. It is really easy for us to say, "please God forgive me of my sins", putting them in a collective basket. I think we do this for a few reasons, we could be lazy and it's too much effort to individually confess our sins, maybe we are embarrassed or possibly we are subconsciously trying to hide them from God. Either way our Father in heaven knows our sins in all their gory detail.

Moses said: “When you become aware of your guilt, you must confess your sin.”

And David too, said this of confessing our sins in Psalm 32: 3-5

“When I refused to confess my sin, my body wasted away, and I groaned all day long. Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat. Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt I said to myself, ‘I will confess my rebellion to the Lord.’ And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone.”

We need to confess our individual sins, no beating about the bush, no making excuses, or rationalising and explaining our position to God. He knows! We can fool those around us, but God doesn’t judge by what He sees and hears, He looks on the heart. So, call it what it is. In Romans Paul says, “Don’t think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves.” Rom 12:3 We need to just get on our knees and confess that this thing is absolutely opposed to God’s character.

Name our sins

Besides which, how can we repent of our sins if we don’t name them, by the very nature of repentance you cannot repent of a basket of sins, we need to take each sin out of the basket and deal with them individually.

As you all know repentance is about turning around, its about doing a 180° change. It is walking in the other direction, it is not just about saying I am “sorry” with no intention of changing or stopping the wrong. Why would God extend his forgiveness and abounding grace to us if we have every intention of continuing in sin?

So that’s it.....? Not quite...

To the degree that we believe—both intellectually and emotionally—that the matter of conquering sin depends on us, we will fail. Conversely, to the degree that we give our heart over to dependence upon the love of God, we will succeed. We need to move from self-centeredness to God-centredness—this is the fundamental and crucial paradigm shift upon which victory over sin hinges.

Sin is not something we will conquer through our own strength. Paul tells us very clearly where the strength to overcome sin comes from in Ephesians 3:16-19

“I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God’s love and keep you strong. And may you have the power to understand, as all God’s people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.”

At the same time this does not mean we can sit back and do nothing,

Chase after...

Paul told us in our Timothy reading to “**Pursue** (or chase after) righteousness and a godly life, along with faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness. **Fight** the good fight. **Take hold** of eternal life.” There is nothing passive about this. We are to run and fight and hold onto our faith if we want a crown of righteousness on that day when Jesus awards them. But we need to know that the power to do this comes from Christ living in our hearts.

If our strength is found in Christ, we confess our sins, truly repent and ask God for forgiveness, we can then surely say:

“Come and listen, all you who fear God, and I will tell you what He did for me. For I cried out to Him for help, praising Him as I spoke. If I had not confessed the sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. But God did listen! He paid attention to my prayer. Praise God, who did not ignore my prayer or withdraw His unfailing love from me”. Ps 66:16-20

And as David also said in Psalm 103 “He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west” and how far is that? Well, its infinitely far, there is no measure.

I would like to close with Paul’s words from Romans 8:

“Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honour at God’s right hand, pleading for us. Can anything ever separate us from Christ’s love? No, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

My prayer for us all today is that we remain rooted and grounded in God’s love and His word, that we confess our sins honestly and humbly to our Father seeking forgiveness and His grace, and that we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. All glory to him, both now and forever. Amen.

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