

Words of Hope

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Message Title: Our Inner Struggle
Series Title: The Heart of the Christian Faith (#8)

Dr. Bill Brownson continues a series “The Heart of the Christian Faith” based on the first eight chapters of the letter to the Romans.

Our Inner Struggle **by Dr. William C. Brownson** **Romans 7:1-25**

What cure can there be for our agonizing inner conflict?

Welcome, dear friends, to another in our series on the heart of the gospel, studies in the letter to the Romans, chapters 1-8. Today it's chapter 7, a very powerful explanation about the continuing struggle that believers continue to have, even after they are justified and united with Christ in death and resurrection. Here's a sample of the way the apostle Paul talks about that inner struggle.

For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am of the flesh, sold . . . under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.

(verses 14-18)

We Are Freed From the Law's Condemnation

As we study this passage we notice a number of things that Paul says about the Law. The first is an encouraging word. We who believe in Christ and have been united with him have died to the condemning power of the Law. He gives the illustration of a woman married to her husband. As long as her husband lives, she cannot turn to another man without becoming an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she's freed from the law with regard to her husband. She is free to marry another. Paul means, “We have died to the law through the body of Christ so that we may be married to another, that is, to Christ and to bear fruit for God.”

The Law Shows Us How Sinful Sin Is

Paul goes on to say that there are many problems that we encounter as Christians when we forget that we died to the law. Then we forget to depend upon the grace of God. We get into the kind of inner conflict that Paul describes. The Law is a

good thing. Paul emphasizes that. The Law is holy and just and good. It's God's law. It is good for us.

Think about the Ten Commandments. They are for peoples' good. When you think about not killing, and not stealing, and not committing adultery, and not coveting, and not bearing false witness, and worshiping the true and living God—these are commands that contribute to the enrichment of human life and guard it from countless dangers. But when we break those rules of God, life is empty, miserable, and torn with conflict. So the Law is a God-given good.

But the Law also shows us our sins. Paul illustrates that. Suppose you want something that belongs to your neighbor. As long as you don't know the commandment "You shall not covet," why should you not want what is his? Or, what is in his house? Or maybe even his wife! But once the commandment comes, then you are aware that coveting is sin.

It is real—the power of sin in us works like this: When a commandment comes to us, something makes us want to step across the line and disobey the command. You can see that in a little child. Just tell a small boy not to open a certain door, or not to go into a particular room, and there is something in him that makes him want to try that very thing!

So the law shows us our sins, and sin uses the good law to work evil in us. Paul says that in this way sin appears as "sinful beyond measure." I think about that often when I hear people constantly using profanity. Think about it. To take the Lord's name in vain gives people no real pleasure. There's no profit from it, as there seems to be from other forms of sin. The only reason some do it is because it's *forbidden*. They are determined to step across that line, as though to say: "Nobody tells me what to do!"—not even God.

Our Inner Conflict

Now Paul goes on to show what a problem sin can continue to be even in the lives of genuine believers. You've heard Paul's anguished confession of doing the things that he hates and not doing the things he loves. Is this an unconverted person or a true Christian? Obviously it is Paul himself. It is his own experience. Paul's words sound like an unconverted person: "sold into slavery," "under sin," "I don't do what I want." "The one thing I want to do is what I don't end up doing. The one thing I hate is what I do! "I find it to be a law that when I want to do good evil is close at hand."

But on the other side Paul can say, "I delight in the law of God in my inmost self." What unconverted person ever says! "With my mind I'm a slave to the law of God"? It would seem like a conflict in someone who is touched by God but still struggling with the law and unable to conquer that indwelling sin. People who have been followers of Jesus for years still experience this kind of inner conflict. I just spoke with someone recently about the fact that the continuing

struggle with sin is what keeps us coming back to dependence on the grace of God.

I've had experiences like that in my life. I knew from the time I had become a believer that it was important for me to spend time each day reading the Bible and enjoying fellowship with God in prayer. I knew that! Yet in my college years I wasn't able to keep it up. I would neglect it and my life would decline spiritually. After a while I would become convicted, then I would go out in the stadium and confess my sins, and resume the life of walking closely with God. Later I would lapse into the same struggle again!

We know that nothing good dwells within our sinful nature. That comes home to us as we have those inner struggles. Remember Isaiah's lament, "Woe is me!" (Isaiah 6:5) Or Paul's "Oh wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:24).

From my own struggles and from the experience of many I know, I believe that Paul's agonizing description comes out of the experience of a true follower of Christ. They long and struggle to be free, to be delivered fully from sin's power, and yet they experience this inner conflict.

Our Hope of Rescue (from Our Inner Conflicts)

As we move toward the end of the chapter, there's a marvelous message about our hope of rescue from conflict with our sinful nature. Paul, when he asks the question, "Who shall deliver me from this body of death?" (v. 24) answers, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Thanks be to God!" (v. 25).

This supports the view we've been taking that a real Christian is speaking. Paul cries out in answer to his own question, "Thanks be to God!" He knows that God can deliver and will deliver him. The answer, the rescue of which he's confident, is through Jesus Christ our Lord. He is the great rescuer, the Savior from sin, both its guilt and its power.

But the full story of that and how it happens still lies ahead in chapter 8. That's what we'll be considering in the next two messages. The last part of verse 25 sums up the conflict within God's people. "With my mind I am a slave to the law of God but with my flesh to the law [or the rule] of sin."

I'm convinced that when we forget that we died to the law in the body of Christ, we get a legal outlook that brings home the awfulness of sin. That mistake stirs up rebellion within us. Then we can slide into this kind of enslavement again to sin. All of us as Christians, at least most of those I know, have experienced this at some time in our lives. So we cry out in that misery of inner conflict, "Who will deliver me?"

We're going to see in Romans, chapter 8, that the key to deliverance is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is scarcely mentioned in chapters 1 through 7. The word *pneuma* is occurring maybe nine times in Chapters 9 through 15, but in

Romans 8, as we'll see next week, the word "Spirit" (*ruach* in Hebrew, *pneuma* in Greek, *spirit* in English), occurs some twenty times!

So we have hope of our rescue and deliverance from the power of sin and this persistent struggle within us. We become conscious more and more of our utter weakness in the presence of temptation, and the frustration of endless defeats. Our hope lies in the power of the Holy Spirit, joining us to Christ, bringing the life of Christ to us, enabling us to live as God's true children.

We'll think about that in the next message. The Holy Spirit living within us delivers us from the power of sin and death. The Holy Spirit, taking up his abode in our lives, brings the presence of Christ to us. And most of all and most wonderfully we'll discover in chapter 8 how the Holy Spirit is the one who, living within our lives, convinces us that we are God's beloved children.

And so he leads us out of this bondage of inner conflict into this wonderful deliverance, peace and joy. We know that we are set free from the rule of sin! We have the Holy Spirit with his life-giving power dwelling within us. We know ourselves to be, in Jesus, children of the living God. We are able to call God "Abba, Father," and live as his freed children. God bless you with that knowledge in your life. Amen.