

ON MORTIFYING SIN – PART 2

Intro

- The church generally does well with doctrines like justification, the sovereignty of God, etc.; however, the church today seems to have lost its way when it comes to sanctification
- This is no small matter because the church should be helping believers think biblically about their sanctification and the pursuit of holiness
- The church's failure on this issue has resulted in many unsanctified believers and leaders
- We must learn what the Word teaches about how to close the gap between our position and our practice
- We are not in practice what we are in position; progressive sanctification is concerned with closing that gap
- Though we are already saints in position, Scripture calls us to work that out in daily practice
- This is the process of spiritual growth...the action of becoming separate from sin and set apart to God...the activity of gaining victory over sin and becoming more like Jesus...the pursuit of godly behavior

Romans 7

- In chapter 6, Paul dealt with our freedom from sin; in chapter 7, he deals with our freedom from the law
- Paul's point in this chapter is that we have a new relationship which provides us the power to be holy
- The old has been severed by death and an entirely new relationship with Christ has come, a relationship which gives you power over sin
- We don't have the same relationship with the bondage of sin and the law we you used to
- Now we have everything we need to say "no" to sin, a power that is proof of the fact that we have been married to Christ...the result ought to be a holy life
- It is important to understand this because sometimes we forget that our relationship to the old has been severed...when this happens, we start to wonder if we have power over sin
- Paul wants us to know just how separate from the old life we are, that we have both died to the law and been married to Christ which supplies us with all the resources we need to live a holy life

The Legal Principle

Romans 7:1 ~ Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives?

- This is something we must "know"
- The law is not binding on believers anymore in the same way that someone who has died is not subject to laws...laws only apply to those who are alive
- Death releases a person from all the obligations of the law
- Paul is making the point that our old relationship with the law has been severed...a clean break has occurred
- Paul knows we forget that and that sometimes we give too much credit to the old relationship, falling back into sin

The Insightful Picture

Romans 7:2-3 ~ For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. 3 So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man.

- Paul uses marriage as an analogy that only death changes a person's relationship to the law
- The marriage covenant is binding until death; however, if a spouse dies, the other spouse is released from the obligations of the marriage covenant
- In the case of a woman whose husband has died, she is free to remarry (in the Lord) as she is no longer bound by the marriage law
- Paul is proving the point that the law has no jurisdiction or authority over a person after he is dead
- We have died to the law and have been married to another (Christ), a fact that changes everything in our pursuit of holiness

The Analogous Proposition

Romans 7:4 ~ Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.

- Here Paul applies the analogy of marriage to the believer and their relationship to the law
- Our first marriage has been dissolved and we are now on our second marriage, our marriage to Christ
- In the same way death breaks the marriage bond, death also breaks the believer's relation to the law
- As death breaks the bond between husband and wife, so death (the believer's death with Christ) breaks the bond which formerly yoked him to the law, and now he is free to enter into union with Christ
- Our old relationship with the law has been replaced by a new relationship with Christ
- Our old husband (law and its condemnation) is dead and we are now in a new marriage to Christ
- We died to our first unfruitful marriage (the law) when we died in Christ and now have been joined to Christ
- This new union does what the law could never do: it gives us the power to be holy, the power to change through the Spirit of Christ
- This is important to understand in the pursuit of holiness because when we forget this, we live as if we have not been betrothed to a new husband...we live as if we are still married to the old
- We are in a new marriage to Christ Himself through which he wants to produce fruit in us (v. 4)

The Former Position

Romans 7:5 ~ For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were *aroused* by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death.

- Someone who is "in the flesh" operates in that sphere, namely an unredeemed person
- A person who is "in the flesh" is someone who still lives in the realm of the flesh; such a person cannot belong to God (this will become very clear in Rom 8:5-9)
- The person who lives "in the flesh" is not a believer; it is someone totally dominated and controlled by their sinful passions prior to coming to Christ
- For this person, the Law aroused their sinful passions...God's holy standard stirred up our rebellion

- When the law tells us that we should not do something, our sinful heart rebels and wants to do the very thing the law prohibits
- The law points out that a knowledge of sin we never had before
- People don't know how bad they really are until the standard of God's Word is placed next to their life
- And when that happens, our natural sinful inclination is to rebel against it as we don't want to be told "no"
- The law of God actually became an incentive to sin...the unbeliever's rebellious nature is awakened when restrictions are placed on him and makes him want to do the very things the law forbids
- Instead of acting as a deterrent to sin (as it should), our sinful passions rebelled against the law and brought us into greater bondage to it
- In this sense, the law aided and abetted our sin
- This results in "bearing fruit to death"

Romans 7:6 ~ But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.

- Believers are no longer bound by this condemning and sin-producing law
- By our union with Christ, we have been released from the law
- We have "died" to the law and our lives are no longer governed by the old (the law, sin, flesh, death)
- We are no longer under the law's dominion and curse
- Instead, we can now "serve in newness of the Spirit"
- Freedom from the law is not freedom to sin...it is freedom to serve...freedom from the law's bondage does not mean freedom to do what the law forbids; rather, it enables us to do what is righteous
- "In our culture, freedom is the ability to do what we want. In the Bible, freedom is the ability to do what we should."¹
- We live now "in the newness of the Spirit" rather than the "oldness of the letter"
- Paul is describing the contrast here between the Old Covenant which was one of letter (external code written on stone tablets) and the New Covenant which is one of Spirit (in which He writes God's law in our hearts)
- We don't live under an external code anymore...it produced only hostility and condemnation because it aroused us to more sin
- We finally have the power to change through the Spirit of Christ because the law is no longer our master and it doesn't stir up our sinful desires or hold us in bondage to our sinful passions
- We live in the power and joy of the Holy Spirit who enables us to obey God joyfully from the heart
- This is the power for our sanctification so why then do we go back to the old?

The Law's Usefulness in Revealing Sin

Romans 7:7 ~ What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET."

- The law is a mirror that reveals the inner man...it reflects and mirrors the perfect righteousness of God
- It tells us much about who God is and it illumines human sinfulness...for the purpose of acting like a schoolmaster to drive us to Christ

¹ Kevin DeYoung

- The law is God's gracious means by which He points out our sin
- This is necessary because we naturally don't feel the weight of our sin nor do we readily admit we are sinners
- This is how Paul came to understand that coveting is sinful
- Before this he had no consciousness of sin but then the Spirit used the law to convict him of coveting
- It was through the law that he came to know his sin...this is why the law is not sinful itself; it is the vehicle that the Spirit uses to make us aware of sin and our need for divine forgiveness

The Law's Role in Provoking Sin

Romans 7:8 ~ But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin *is* dead.

- Once Paul realized what coveting was, all he could do was covet
- The very existence of the prohibition of covetousness provided sin with the opportunity to covet
- This is human nature: Prohibitions tend to awaken a desire to do the thing that is forbidden
- "There was a pear tree near our vineyard, laden with fruit. One stormy night we rascally youth set out to rob it and carry our spoils away. We took off a huge load of pears...not to feast upon ourselves, but to throw them to the pigs, though we ate just enough to have the pleasure of forbidden fruit. They were nice pears, but it was not the pears that my wretched soul coveted, for I had plenty better at home. I picked them simply in order to become a thief. The only feast I got was a feast of iniquity, and that I enjoyed to the full. What was it that I loved in that theft? Was it the pleasure of acting against the law, in order that I, a prisoner under rules, might have a maimed counterfeit of freedom by doing what was forbidden, with a dim similitude of omnipotence? The desire to steal was awakened simply by the prohibition of stealing."²
- This is what Paul means when he says "for apart from the law sin is dead"
- That sin was dead does not mean that it did not exist but that it was not as active before the law as after
- Sin was dormant until it was awakened by the presence of the law but when the law came sin was aroused

The Law's Role in Condemning Sin

Romans 7:9-11 ~ I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; 10 and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; 11 for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me

- Prior to the law convicting him of sin, Paul was alive in the sense that he thought he was in good standing
- There had been a time when he had not realized the force of the law's demands, no conviction of sin
- Paul is referring to the life of the natural man, the happy pagan, the person who lives cheerfully with no reference to law and with an untroubled conscience
- He was under no conviction of sin, living freely, without any concerns for sin
- In a sense, life before Christ was very easy as we just did what we wanted
- We had no concerns about holiness, no constraints to withhold us from living out our sinful ambitions
- But that all changed when he came to understand the demands of holy standard

² Augustine in *Confessions*

- Sin became alive to him when, through the law, he became aware of it and was convicted about it
- He began to see himself as he really was and began to understand how far short he came of the law's demand...he came to realize his true condition
- He died in the sense of his realizing that all his religious accomplishment were spiritual rubbish
- This resulted in sin deceiving and killing him...deceit is one of sin's most subtle and disastrous evils

The Law's Role in Denouncing Sin

Romans 7:12-13 ~ So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. 13 Therefore did that which is good become a *cause of death* for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.

- There is nothing wrong with the law as it is God's perfect standard and reflection of his perfect character
- Our real problem is not the law but sin...the law simply serves as the mirror which enables us to recognize sin for the evil thing it is

The Internal Conflict with Indwelling Sin

- Although the penalty of sin has been removed in Christ, the presence of sin has not been removed yet
- There is a fierce internal conflict with sin that still rages inside of us...indwelling sin that still resides within our unredeemed humanness
- There is a painful, ongoing struggle between walking according to the Spirit and surrendering to the vestigial remnants of the flesh
- This conflict is very real and very intense and one that only a believer experiences
- A Christian is no longer in Adam but is now in Christ, complete with a new nature and a new disposition
- But sin still clings to our humanness and even though we hate it and despise it, we still struggle with it
- This is the normal experience for every true believer: an internal fight with indwelling sin
- This battle began when we became believers...life was uncomplicated before we were born again as we just did whatever we wanted to do
- But when we come to Christ, life becomes a whole lot more complicated because we are now involved in a war that penetrates the very deepest recesses of our souls
- Where there was no battle with sin before, there is now a battle that rages daily
- This results in a spiritual tug of war within us, a battle between our desire to live holy unto God and those sinful selfish desires which still flare up from time to time
- Paul illustrates this battle in vv. 14-25
- Various views on what this passage represents:
 - **First**, some hold that Paul is referring to himself in his unregenerate state as an unbeliever
 - Those who hold to this view don't accept that a truly regenerate and mature believer like Paul could describe himself the way he does here
 - If he is truly a believer, how can he describe himself as "sold into bondage to sin" (v. 14)?
 - Could Paul truly confess that he cannot do what he wants to do, while he does what he hates (v. 15) as a believer?
 - Could Paul really be a believer and admit that "sin dwells in me" (v. 17, 20)?
 - Could Paul really be a believer and say in v. 18 ~ I know that nothing good dwells in me?

- Could Paul really be a believer if he cries out in great anguish and wretchedness for deliverance → v. 24 ~ Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?
- But there are reasons to not take this as referring to Paul as an unbeliever:
 - The way Paul delights in the law is not characteristic of unbelievers (v. 22)
 - The present tense verbs used in this section point to his present life as a believer (past tense verbs in vv. 8, 9, 11...present tense verbs in vv. 14, 15, 16)
- **Second**, some hold that Paul is referring to himself as an immature, backsliding believer (a carnal Christian)
- They think this because Paul seems defeated in this chapter, unable to have any victory in the Christian life
- They see chapter 7 as a chapter of defeat and chapter 8 as the chapter of victory
- However, while it is true that believers can act carnally, they cannot perpetually live in a state of carnality
- **Third**, this refers to Paul's struggle as a believer
- This is preferred view because Paul uses terms here that can really only refer to believers
 - He has a humble opinion of himself (v. 18)
 - He delights in the law (vv. 14, 16, 19, 22)
 - He hates sin and wants to do good (vv. 15, 18, 19, 21)
- In fact, the tension that exists in vv. 14-25 between what he delights in and wants to do vs. what he actually does is the proof of a true believer
- So, this section describes the normal life of a believer in battling indwelling sin
- This represents a believer's normal struggle with sin this side of heaven
- True believers fight and battle with sin and the more sanctified we become, the more painful to us is the presence of sin in us that contradicts the perfect standard of holiness
- We must acknowledge that the Christian life is a war between our new nature in Christ and the remnants of our unredeemed humanity
- Indwelling, remaining sin continues to bedevil us in thought, word, and deed until the day we die
- Sin never takes a vacation or lets up...it is always looking over our shoulder and whispering in our ear
- "If sin only came to visit now and then, like an unwelcome in-law, we could get a lot of godliness done while it was away. If it were like an army that struck, then pulled back for a time, we could refresh ourselves and fortify our defenses during the calm. But the flesh is a relentless homebody and assailant."³
- "This calls for rigorous preparation, constant alertness, dogged determinism, and moment-by-moment trust in him who alone can give us victory."⁴
- Paul's point is that there is no victory in our struggle with sin apart from the Holy Spirit
- Paul is saying that just as the law of God is unable to **save** a person, it is also unable to **sanctify** a person
- The law is still good and holy and righteous and can continue to reveal and convict of sin in our lives just as it did before salvation; however, our ability to obey it comes not from ourselves, but the Spirit
- This is a daily battle and struggle but with the help and power of the Spirit we can have victory
- Even the very flow of these chapters argues for this position:
 - Chapter 6 = we are no longer slaves to sin but slaves to God; we don't have to sin anymore because its power has been broken

³ Kris Lundgaard, *The Enemy Within*, 32.

⁴ James Montgomery Boice, *Romans*, 767

- Chapter 7 = but we still struggle with sin and still do the things we don't want to do and don't do the things we want to do
- Chapter 8 = victory over sin is found in the power of the Holy Spirit

Romans 7:14 ~ For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin

- Continuing his argument from the previous section, Paul indicates that the law is spiritual and good
- But the problem is he is “of flesh”...he doesn't say “I am in the flesh” (cf. v. 5)...but he is “of flesh”
- Believers still possess an unredeemed humanness...the flesh is the place where sin still resides in us as believers
- This is why he says he is “sold into bondage to sin”
- Certainly, that can describe an unbeliever but it can also describe the fact that sin still resides in a believer
- Sin no longer controls us as believers but sin still dogs us because it lingers in our unredeemed humanness and wages war against us
- This is a description of the mature Christian who is very aware of sin that remains within them
- Our battle with sin is strenuous and life-long because sin still hangs on

Romans 7:15 ~ For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I *would* like to *do*, but I am doing the very thing I hate.

- On the one hand, he doesn't do what he wants; on the other hand, he is doing what he doesn't want to do
- He's frustrated at the discrepancy he sees in his life which results in an inner turmoil of sincerely wanting to obey the law of God but realizing that he was unable to live up to its perfect standard

Romans 7:16 ~ But if I do the very thing I do not want *to do*, I agree with the Law, *confessing* that the Law is good

- Paul's point is that, when he doesn't do what the law requires, he doesn't defend himself and claim the law is unjust because he knows the law is not responsible for his sin and it's not the law's fault
- This is an argument for Paul being a believer as this is not the heart of an unbeliever
- He defends the divine standard and he wants to align himself with it, even though he still doesn't keep it

Romans 7:17 ~ So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

- Paul is not trying to escape personal responsibility here as he is not saying there is some force that made him do it unwillingly
- It's not the real Paul who does it...it is not what his deep inner self, renewed in Christ, wants to do
- In his new nature, he wants to obey and wants to conform himself to God's holy standard
- But this new nature is housed in a fallen flesh in which sin still operates
- “Sin is pictured as having taken up residence in Paul. This is not the honored guest, nor the paying tenant, but the ‘squatter,’ not legitimately there, but very difficult to eject.”⁵

Romans 7:18-20 ~ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. 19 For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. 20 But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

⁵ Leon Morris

- Paul reiterates the same problem he has described in vv. 14-17
- Paul locates the problem as being “in me, this is, in my flesh” (v. 18)
- He takes full responsibility for his sin...he doesn't blame others!
- This is a key principle in sanctification: our problems do not mostly outside of us but inside
- One of the greatest problems in becoming holy is a failure to take responsibility for our own sin
- Paul wants to do what is right but finds himself not doing it...again, due to indwelling sin
- He sees an indwelling principle of sin that once owned him as a slave and that still expressed itself through him doing things he did not want to do and not doing things he desired to do
- There is a distinction between the true self (“I”) and the sin dominated flesh which is the real culprit, the wicked squatter dwelling in Paul who is at the bottom of all this iniquity

Romans 7:21-24 ~ I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. 22 For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, 23 but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?

- Again, Paul states the problem “is present in me”
- This principle of indwelling sin is inside of us and operates within us which results in a constant tug of war
- On the one hand, Paul really does agree that the law of God is good, but on the other hand, he finds in reality the very opposite occurring (vv. 22-23)
- This indwelling sin “wages war” against him (v. 23)
- “waging war” = *antistrateuomai* = *anti* – “against”; *strateuomai* – “to go to war”...means “to actively oppose...to make a military expedition...to take the field against...to war against”
- The Christian life is an all-out battle between your new heart which wants to obey God and your flesh which is still drawn to the ways of the world
- This makes Paul cry out “Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?” (v. 24)

Romans 7:25 ~ 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.

- This struggle with sin should never lead us to despair because for us as believers there is hope
- The frustration of dealing with indwelling sin must never be dissociated from the sequel of confident hope
- Paul is looking to the final triumph of Jesus Christ when we will join our resurrected and exalted Lord for all eternity in our new bodies
- The anticipation of our future resurrection is our great hope as there is coming a day when our salvation will be complete when we receive our glorified bodies and the presence of sin is done away with
- It was not death Paul longed for as the blessed hope but the deliverance through the resurrection of the body
- “Victory is ours. The triumph of grace is assured, regardless of how badly we may think we are doing now or how near despair we may be due to the intensity or duration of the struggle. It is the very knowledge of a final victory that will enable us to fight on.”⁶

⁶ Boice