

July 5, 2020 Myrla & Concordia  
Romans 7:15-23

To listen to the apostle Paul in this morning's reading from Romans, you might get the impression that Paul wouldn't stack up terribly well in a "being spiritual" contest. Next to those who like to boast that they "walk the walk" and "talk the talk" and they aren't simply "Christians" but real deal "Christ followers," true blue "disciples," "spiritual" not "carnal" Christians, the apostle Paul doesn't seem to have much to offer.

The shelves of Koorong and many similar 'Christian' bookshops are filled with volumes that offer programs and advice on how to develop disciplines, purpose and 'victorious Christian living' that seem to sell very well.

Forget all that spirituality talk you hear that the answer lies within you. It doesn't. The problem lies within you, not the answer.

Paul doesn't do what he wants to do, but instead he does the very things that he hates. He agrees with the law conceptually, but he can't seem to get his members to cooperate. In fact, he's come to the conclusion that nothing good whatsoever dwells in his flesh. He wants to do good but doesn't have the ability to carry it out. His spirit may be willing, but his flesh is hopelessly weak. In fact, whenever he sets out to do good, he winds up doing evil instead of good. Whenever he does good, evil always lies close at hand. He looks at his own life and sees a literal war going on within himself, a war of flesh vs. spirit, members vs. mind, outer man vs. inner man, Adam vs. Christ. His conclusion? "O wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"

This is the heart of what it means to be a believer in the skin of an unbeliever, Christ wearing an Adam suit, simultaneously sinful and righteous.

This is not about sins, as in the things you think, do, and say; the accumulation of failures to comply with ideals you have set yourself. This is about Sin (capital S), as in the disease, the condition, the deep corruption of our humanity that coupled with the Law brings a multitude of sins and ultimately death.

This text calls for honesty. We must be honest with ourselves and not try to fake it. There's no faking it with Paul. This is why he writes this chapter in the first person with the big apostolic "I." If he had said "you," people wouldn't listen to him. They'd argue with him and try to justify themselves.

If I stood up here and said to you, "You are flesh, sold under sin. You don't do the things you want and you do the very thing you hate. There's nothing good in you." ...If I talked like that, you'd get angry and defensive and start to argue with me in your head and tune me out. You'd start to justify yourself and recite all the good and noble things that you do and how "spiritual" you really are and how you are really making great strides in your "walk with the Lord," as if you and Jesus were together on a little power walk through life.

But Paul takes things in a different direction. Instead of going “you” on us, he goes “I.” “I am flesh, sold under Sin.” “Wretched man that I am!” And that leaves you thinking. If that’s how it is with the apostle Paul, God’s main man to the Gentiles, the persecutor turned apostle who saw the risen and glorified Lord Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, who was struck blind for three days and only recovered his sight when he was baptized at the hand of Ananias ...– if that’s how it is with the apostle Paul, saint Paul, then can it be any less true of each of us? Of you?

Admit it. You agree with the law in principle. You like the idea of doing the will of God. You really wake up each morning praying and hoping that today somehow will be different. I will be a better person today. I will reflect the love of Jesus to everyone and let my light so shine before men that they would see my good works and fall down on their knees and give glory to our Father in heaven. And then the same old buttons get pushed by your spouse, the kids, the neighbour, the guy on the road driving too slowly while texting, the email or bill from the power insurance telephone or internet company, ...you know what I’m talking about? And by the end of the day that walk with the Lord is barely a crawl much less a bright and bushy tailed power walk, and the best we can say at the close of the day is “forgive me where I have sinned.”

You see, the problem is not that we lack proper motivation or methods or discipline or whatever. The problem is capital S Sin. Sin that lurks within our members, that corrupts our humanity, that is the root of all the evil things that we do.

The war that Paul speaks of going on in himself is also going on in each of us. The spirit, our “inner being,” the new person you are that you can’t see, “delights in the Law of God.” That’s what the psalmist David meant when he said, “I delight in your Law, O Lord, and I meditate upon it day and night.” (Psalm 1)

To the new man, born from above by water and Spirit, the Law is a delight. It describes what you look like in Christ. It’s the “new You” or “You version 2.0” recreated in Christ. But that’s your “inner being,” which means you can’t see it. It’s hidden “in, with, and under” your outer being, your flesh, your “members” or the “old You,” “You version 1.0,” what you can see.

The new You and old You are at war. Your mind and your members are at odds with each other. You want to do one thing and you wind up doing the very thing you didn’t want. Your reflexes are off.

The Adam suit doesn’t obey the Christ command (at least not very well). Adam needs to be coerced to cooperate. It’s not a pretty sight. Downright wretched at times. “O wretched man that I am.” When we look at ourselves in light of the Law, that’s about all we can say. “O wretched man that I am!” I’m a mess. Who will rescue me from this body of death?

Answer: “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ, our Lord!” That’s who will rescue you. Jesus will. He said, “Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” “Come to me, all you who feel your own wretchedness, your death, your sin, those of you who can’t find anything good in you, those of you who can’t seem to get it right no matter how hard you

try.” “Come to me,” Jesus says, “And I will give you rest. Let me bear the yoke of the Law for you. You can’t bear it. It will kill you. I’ll bear it for you. You take my yoke upon you, and learn from me. I will teach you to be free. I will teach you to be forgiven. I will teach you to live by grace. I’m not like Moses. I’m gentle and lowly in heart. I come not to accuse but to forgive. I come not to judge but to justify. Come to me, and you will find rest for your souls.”

There is no rest under the Law. There is the endless noise of the conscience, either accusing yourself or making excuses for yourself. There is only endless work and the inner war between flesh and spirit. O wretched men that we are! And were it not for Christ, O wretched people we would be forever.

But thanks be to God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

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