

THE SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

July 27, 2014 - Romans 7:15-25a

15 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. 16 And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. 17 As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. 18 I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. 19 For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. 21 So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. 22 For in my inner being I delight in God's law; 23 but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. 24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Someone once said, "Ignorance is bliss." In reality, however, it is probably better to know the truth, to face up to it and to deal with it. Many years ago, when early missionaries began outreach in South Africa, they took along a supply of small pocket mirrors. The people had never before seen themselves except in the reflection of the water and they were impressed with the mirror. So impressed were the people that it opened the door for the missionaries to preach the Word of God.

One particular tribe heard about this "special glass" and invited the missionaries to come to their tribe. The princess of this tribe thought she was the most beautiful of all women, but when she looked at herself in the mirror she realized she was the ugliest woman she had ever seen. In anger she smashed the mirror, had the missionaries driven out and forbade anyone to ever possess a mirror. In the mirror was the truth; she could not deny what she had seen -- even if she would never look at herself in a mirror again.

All of us as Christians are a lot like that princess. Without the Word of God we live in the bliss of ignorance. We don't know how we really look -- until we look into the mirror of God's law. Then there is no denying it, no way to escape the realities of what we see. And that poses a dilemma for the Christian. We know what the law demands. We know God's forgiveness for our sins. We know that we want to follow the law of God as our guide. But, how do we do it? How do we deal with the dilemma? As the inspired writer speaks to us this morning let us see the answer as we consider

THE CHRISTIAN'S CONSTANT DILEMMA.

WE DO WANT TO FOLLOW GOD'S LAW.

NOT ACCORDING TO OUR SINFUL NATURE.

In that state we were blind and opposed to God. In that state we were in ignorance. We could care less about what God says. That's why many people aren't concerned about their language, attending church, or their lifestyle. They don't know what God says or they have blocked it out of their minds and lives.

HERE WE ARE TALKING ABOUT THE "NEW MAN."

We are the redeemed children of God. We are people who take seriously what God says in his Word. We know that we have broken every commandment in the book. James says, "**Even if we keep the whole law yet offend in one point we are guilty of all.**" We repent of all our sins and believe in Jesus Christ for the full, free and complete remission of all our sins through faith in Jesus Christ.

WE AGREE THAT **"THE LAW IS GOOD"** (v. 16).

We put our stamp of approval on it. We have no problem with what God says. We know that is what God wants. Our failure to live up to the specific requirements of the law does not change the law's validity. The fault of our conduct can't be attributed to God's law!

WITH PAUL WE **"DELIGHT IN GOD'S LAW"** (v. 22).

Our redeemed inner being opposes our sinful nature. We are like the characters in Robert Louis Stevenson's story, **"The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde."** Like Dr. Jekyll we are fine, highly respected, beloved citizens of the community. At other times we change into another person and become like Mr. Hyde, a loathsome, evil, and cruel monster. We like to think of ourselves like Dr. Jekyll, but the Mr. Hyde often comes out. Perhaps this little story describes you:

*"Within my earthly temple there's a crowd,
There's one of us that humble; one that's proud.
There's one that's broken-hearted for his sins,
And one who, unrepentant, sits and grins.
There's one who loves his neighbor as himself,
And one who cares for naught but fame and self.
From much corroding care would I be free
If once I could determine which is me."*

With the Lord's strength and power we delight to find new ways to express our love to God. We eagerly desire to come to church/Bible study. We want to use our abilities in God's service. We want to reach out and share the Gospel with others and we look for ways/opportunities for doing so. Yes! We want to follow God's law as a guide in our lives! But there is the dilemma.

SIN WITHIN US OPPOSES OUR CHRISTIAN INTENT (vv. 15, 17-21, 23).

WE ARE SINNER-SAINTS.

Paul puts it this way: ¹⁵ **"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do."** We feel that conflict, that dilemma, because that sin is still there within us. Have you ever said, "I don't know why I do it? I don't want to do it. I know better!"? If you have said that you are just like Paul. As believers we don't claim the sin to be ours -- although we know we have done it!

We fully intend to follow God's will -- we read it and hear it from his Word and we say, "That's for me!" Then comes inventory time and we find our performance didn't come close to our intentions think nothing about perfection! Enter a contest that requires skill -- the judges take one look at your entry and throw out your best efforts. Very depressing -- it is a dilemma! We are both Jekyll and Hyde!

LISTEN TO PAUL EXPLAIN HOW THIS HAPPENS: ¹⁷ **"As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸ I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹ For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. ²¹ So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me."**

It is like an intruder living within us. This intruder is responsible for what happens. Like a guest (welcome or unwelcome) in your home you as the owner are still ultimately responsible. The Spirit of God lives in us as a welcome guest. So the struggle between the two goes on and we face that dilemma every day. What a blessing that we have that spiritual rebirth through faith in Jesus Christ! We should thank God for those blessings! Consider this example: A guard dog

looks very harmless and lies quietly by his master's side until he is provoked -- then he jumps into action. Sin is like that dog. It lies there quietly within us until "provoked" -- until we want to do something God-pleasing -- then sin growls and attacks viciously to stop us. You decide to go to church but the family can't get going, the phone rings, the coffee pot doesn't work, etc. You decide to invite a friend to church -- all kinds of excuses come to mind why you should put it off to a "better" time. You resolve to control your temper and then one little thing sets you off.

LOOK AT THE DILEMMA:

²³ **"I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members."** God's law is showing our "new man" how to display love for God and our neighbor. The law of sin is showing our sinful nature how to display love for the devil, the world and our flesh.

These two laws are active antagonists. Should we give in and surrender? Should we say, "It's no use"? As believers we should never be satisfied with some lower level of Christian life. We will win victories (and we should fight for them) though we will never be fully victorious this side of heaven. In that sense the dilemma continues.

WE YEARN FOR FINAL DELIVERANCE.

THERE WILL BE AN END TO OUR DILEMMA.

Paul asks the question: ²⁴ **"What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"** Paul looks forward to the time when he will leave his body behind and go to heaven to be with his Lord. Paul knows that on Judgment Day he will receive a glorified body and will be able to serve God perfectly forever.

We have that same hope and confidence. We acknowledge and deal with the realities of that dilemma. We know that there will be an end to it. We know where we can appeal for help while we wait for that final deliverance.

THE VICTORY IS THROUGH JESUS CHRIST.

Paul says,, ²⁵ **"Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord!"** Like Paul we can take no credit for that victory. God gained it and worked that faith in us. Christ defeated sin and death for us. The Spirit works that faith and keeps us in that faith.

Our response is like that of Paul -- **"Thanks be to God."** Yes, the victory is ours now. Yes, we can fight the good fight of faith and thank God because we are the victors through faith in him even as we work out the dilemmas of everyday life. Amen.

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