

OVERCOMING THE LAW OF SIN IN OUR MEMBERS

This study endeavours to answer questions by a Brother in Christ, who despite his most earnest efforts, has failed to overcome the power of sin.

His Query

‘As a Christian I want to change. As a person who knows what’s good for them, I want to change. I talk about wanting to change but do I actually want to change? Is it my will to change in my subconscious mind?’

ANSWER:

I commend you for your honest self-appraisal, and for the questions you are asking, questions that most Christians don’t think about. It may surprise you that the apostle Paul was facing the same dilemma, and so I will set forth his experience in his own words.

“For we know that the Law is spiritual; but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. For that which 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. But if I do the very thing I do not wish to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that it is good. So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which indwells me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish. But if I am doing the very thing I do not wish, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, 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. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? 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. Rom 7:14-2.

Let us analyse what Paul was saying. The real reason that he couldn’t overcome sin was that he had what he called a ‘law of sin’ implanted in his fleshly mind that continually warred against his spirit, preventing him from doing what he knew was right. What is this law of sin, and where did it come from?

When Adam and Eve, as representatives of mankind, chose to obey Satan rather than God, justice decreed that Satan had the right to implant his mark of sin on mankind. Paul called Satan’s mark a law of sin because it continually and consistently opposed his spirit and impelled him to sin. In frustration, Paul cries, **“Who will set me free from the body of this death?”** and then, **“Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”**

We may continue reading to Chapter 8, expecting to see the answer to Paul’s dilemma, but we see a preliminary set of statements about the destructive nature or the

carnal nature, or the flesh, which is home to the law of sin, compared with walking in victory in the spirit.

Rom 8:1-13.

- **“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.”**

If we are guided by the Spirit rather than being governed by the dictates of the flesh, we are under no condemnation.

- **“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.”**

By walking in the spirit, the law of sin and death has been replaced by the higher law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

- **“He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”**

We cannot fulfil the law by fleshly zeal or willpower, but are decreed to be righteous when we seek to be governed by our spirits as they are guided by the Holy Spirit.

- **“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is [spiritual] death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.”**

Those who are governed by their carnal natures walk in spiritual death, whilst those who are governed by their spirits have life and peace.

- **“Therefore, brethren, we are debtors — not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die [spiritually]; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”**

Now we come to the final conclusion of this section: We cannot tame our carnal natures by fleshly effort, and so there is only one effective outcome - the fleshly nature must be put to death by the Spirit. Paul does not tell us how to overcome the law of sin in Chapter 8, but it is outlined in Chapter 6.

Romans 6 – Overcoming the law of sin by the Spirit

Before studying this section on what happened in our baptism, we should be reminded that there is spiritual truth or reality, which is eternal - and earthly, or physical truth that we see, truth which is temporary, or constantly changing. Here we are looking at spiritual truth, or what happened to us spiritually in our baptism, rather than focusing on its physical elements.

Paul starts by saying that we were baptised into Christ [including the Father and Holy Spirit]. Spiritually, our spirits were united with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and by the Spirit they indwelt us. Paul goes on to say that because we were baptised into

Christ, we became part of what happened to Him - in this case united with Him in His death, burial, and resurrection.

“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?”

When Paul is talking about ‘we,’ he is referring to our ‘old man,’ or who and what we were before being saved, with that nature in which was embedded the law of sin that compelled us to sin. So what Paul is claiming is that our carnal sin nature in which the law of sin was implanted, was incorporated in Christ’s death in our baptism. This is a spiritual reality, but has no effect on us unless we claim it by believing it and testifying to it in faith.

Paul then declares that our ‘old man,’ or who we were before salvation, was buried with Christ in the waters of baptism. This involves more than the death of the law of sin, but also the sins that it created. Again this is a spiritual truth that we can claim as a reality. All past sins and misdemeanours relating to our ‘old man are spiritually buried,’ and Satan has no grounds to make any accusations or claim against them. Paul goes on to say that if we were buried with Christ, we were also resurrected with Him.

Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in *the likeness of His resurrection...*” [*‘the likeness of’*] was added by translators, the original text saying that we were in His resurrection] Spiritually, we were raised with Him in His resurrection as new creations, set free from the law of sin, and united with Jesus in the power of His indwelling life.

Spiritually, what happened to us is that our old man with its embedded law of sin, was united with Christ in His death. We were raised out of the waters of baptism as new creations, set free from the law of sin in our members. Paul continues,

“...knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin.”

In Verse 11, Paul tells us how to apply this knowledge as a means of setting us free from the bondage to the law of sin. **“Likewise you also, reckon [it to be true in your heart] yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** Rom 6:3-7 & 11.

If we believe and claim by faith that Satan’s law of sin has been put to death, the Holy Spirit will make it a reality, and its compulsive power will be banished from us. If our belief and faith are sure, we may expect that the compulsion to sin is no longer active. It has been dealt with. But that still leaves us with our natural man, with its tendency to cater to the flesh.

Overcoming Sin in the natural Man

In most of his letters Paul devotes a section on dealing with being rid of the characteristics of our old man, or who and what we were before salvation - traits that still

cling to us. Paul used the analogy of taking off and putting on clothes as we prepare for the day ahead. Here are some examples.

“Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him...” Col 3:9-11.

“...that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.” Eph 4:22-24.

As mentioned earlier, the old man is what we were as carnal self-centred beings before being saved. The new man is us united with Christ, with His image being formed in us by the working of God. In putting on the new man, we are in fact putting on Christ.

“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts.” Rom 13:14.

“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Gal 3:27.

How do we put off the old man and put on Christ?

When Paul used the analogy of getting dressed, we can apply this to preparing ourselves for the coming day in our morning prayers. As an integral part of our morning prayers, we should reject our carnal nature, declaring it to be incorporated in Christ’s death.

“I [the old man] have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” Gal 2:20-21.

Similarly, we put on Christ, declaring that we choose to live in union with Him, allowing Him to reign in every part of our being. Jesus likened this procedure to taking up our cross daily.

“Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it.” Mark 8:34-36.

How do we overcome Satan’s accusations?

In the Twelfth Chapter of Revelation we are told that Satan accuses us day and night, and then it shows us three ways of using the word to overcome them.

“Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, “Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.” Rev 12:10-12.

The **word of our testimony** is probably the most relevant in this study, but the other two are also important. The word of our testimony is our stating actual words from the bible which apply to our situation.

For instance - a word of testimony for our death to the carnal nature of the old man -

‘I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I [the old man with its carnal nature] who live, but Christ lives in me...’ Gal 2:20.

OR:

I have **“died to sins, [and] live for righteousness.”** 1 Peter 2:24.

OR

“Our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.” Rom 6:6.

OR

I am **“dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** Rom 6:11.

What happens to our word of testimony? Obviously it is heard in heaven and provokes a response. The apostle John states, **“For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.”** 1 John 5:7.

When your testimony is heard in heaven the Father and the Holy Spirit respond by commencing a work to destroy the power of the old man with its carnal nature. Usually this does not happen instantaneously, because the work is generally directed at the things in us` that still give way to fleshly desire. This will become clearer when we study the next means of overcoming.

“they did not love their [self] lives to the death.”

In other words, those who overcome were willing to forsake the fleshly desire for things that lead to sin. Your question at the start was very astute. *‘As a person who knows what's good for them, I want to change. I talk about wanting to change but do I actually want to change? Is it my will to change in my subconscious mind?’*

Your conclusion was that if you really did not want to change in your heart, no amount of prayer will bring it about. This is where the Holy Spirit starts His work by changing your desire for the thing causing you to sin, until you hate it so strongly that you are finally willing to let it go. In my experience God lets you fail again and again, making you more and more remorseful and repentant, until your desire for that sin vanishes.

This experience may be taxing, but you should not get down on yourself, for it is God working His purpose in you. Remember Paul’s words about spiritual eternal truth, and temporary physical reality.

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.” 2 Cor 4:16-5:1.

The eternal spiritual truth is that you are eternally saved and without sin in God’s sight. What is happening to you is God’s working which is bringing about a slow but sure change of heart. Paul advises you to keep your eyes on the eternal reality of who you are in Christ with God’s blessing.

Relinquishment

Relinquishment is a spiritually led process experienced by many Christians who have been brought by God to a state of helplessness to overcome their besetting sin, and are led by the Spirit to abandon their state into the hands of God. This is the testimony of a sister in Christ.

‘As a Christian I still smoked for a few years, and had no concerns about it. However the Lord did put it on my heart to quit, obviously He knew it would be in my best interest. I agreed with that and set about quitting. For a few months it was a miserable failure and I just felt more and more guilty and awful. I ended up in desperate tears and prayed that if He wanted me to give up smoking He would have to do it because I couldn’t. I woke up the next morning with no desire for a cigarette and I haven’t had a cigarette since. Actually I don’t think I could face one. That was about fifty years ago.’

“The blood of the Lamb” is the most powerful weapon in your armoury, because no matter how much you sin -

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9-10.

“But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.” 1 John 1:7.