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Sermon Notes

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The Intense Struggle With Sin

Romans 7:13-25

Armistice Day: November 11, 1918

- Called the War to End All Wars
- Cease-fire set for 11th hour of 11th day of 11th month
- At village of Ville-sur-Haine, a Canadian soldier named Private George Price was awaiting, as were millions of fellow soldiers, the end to the bloodiest and most confusing war in human history. It was two minutes to 11. At that moment a German sniper bullet rang out and Price was killed... perhaps the very last casualty of WWI
- The Central Powers lost the war as 3.5 million men
- The Allied powers won the war, but it cost 5.1 million men
- Thomas Hardy wrote a poem to mark the Armistice

There had been years of passion—scorching, cold
And much Despair, and Anger heaving high
Care whitely watching, Sorrows manifold
Among the young, among the weak and old
And the pensive Spirit of Pity whispered 'Why?'

Men had not paused to answer. Foes distraught
Pierced the thinned peoples in brute-like blindness,
Philosophies that sages long had taught,
And Selflessness, were an unknown thought,
And 'Hell!' and 'Shell!' were yapped at Lovingkindness

Calm fell. From heaven distilled a clemency;
There was peace on earth, and silence in the sky;
Some could, some could not, shake off misery:

The Sinister Spirit sneered: 'It had to be!
And again the Spirit of Pity whispered 'Why?'

- Why indeed? SIN LEAVES US ASKING WHY DID WE DO IT??? WHAT WAS GAINED?

I. A Very Difficult Passage

A. Trouble at the start

Augustine changed his view on it after much study

Illus. Coke can rolling on the floor of the car

B. Context: the Outworking of the Christian life

1. Romans 6:1 "Shall we go on sinning that grace may increase?"
2. Issue: sin in the life of a Christian
3. More specifically: the role of the law in Christian life

C. Problem: Who is speaking & what is his condition?

1. Is this Paul's autobiography?
 - a. NASB has no less than 46 uses of "I", "Me", "My" in this section
 - b. simple interpretation: Paul is speaking of himself

vs. 15 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.

- c. others think Paul may be speaking as a representative Jew... Jewish nation's experience under the Law

I hold that this is Paul speaking of his own spiritual experience

2. If so, what part of his life does it correspond to?
 - a. is it before he was converted?
 - b. is it after he was converted?

Problem:

1) Too Lowly of Christians: one side sees too much bondage to sin for a Christian... we're supposed to be free from sin... never slaves to sin again

vs. 14 "I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin."

BUT....

6:14 For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

How can these two be reconciled? Is Paul a Christian, yet also a slave to sin?

2) Too Highly of non-Christians: other side gives too much credit for a natural desire for good inside an unconverted sinner

Romans 8:6-8 The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; ⁷ the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. ⁸ Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

BUT...

vs. 22 For in my inner being I delight in God's law

If the unregenerate man is a slave to sin, if his mind in death, if his very nature is hostile to God and hates God's law and cannot submit to God's law, how can Paul be speaking as a non-Christian?

D. The Intricacies of Human Personality and of Sin

1. This is ME!!!
2. Deep psychology of the human nature

Who am I really??

Why do I struggle with things I hate?

Why do I keep making the same mistakes over and over again?

NOTE: Psychological terms... language of the inner man

"It is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it..."

"In my inner being, I delight in God's law..."

This is a deep probing of the human psyche LONG BEFORE Sigmund Freud or Carl Jung were born

E. Importance of Working This Out

IMPORTANCE: How you resolve this will determine a lot about how you view the gospel and your daily life

What about sin in your life? How does it REALLY stand between you and God

2 Peter 1:10 Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure.

Philippians 2:12 continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling

This is as practical as it gets... what should you do about the struggle you have with sin?

Jesus spoke with utmost seriousness about the dangers of sin:

Matthew 5:27-30 "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.'²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

You mean lust can send my soul to hell?? YES!! But I struggle with many sins, not just one... does it mean I'm not a Christian?

Does this chapter not resonate with your experience to its very core??

vs. 15 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.

Rightly understanding Romans 7 will go a long way to help you understand who you are in Christ and in the world... now... day after day, struggling with sin

Dockery: "Proclamation of a gospel which only promises pardon, peace, and power will result in converts who sooner or later become disillusioned or deceitful about their actual Christian experience."

II. Historical Wrestlings: Four views

- A. View #1: Non-Christian... or perhaps someone "almost converted"
- B. View #2: Any legal moralist... Possibly Jewish
- C. View #3: Immature convert to Christ

D. View #4: Mature Christian

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! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

Illus: Luther said "I am at the same time both righteous and a sinner."

BUT...

vs. 14 "I am sold as a slave to sin."

WHAT DOES THAT MEAN??? How can that be true, after all we've learned?

III. Overview of the Text

A. Indwelling Sin: Three Cycles

1. Cycle 1: vs. 14-17

vs. 14-17 We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. 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.

- a. statement of problem with self... problem NOT with Law but with ME
- b. statement of division: one part of me at war against another part
- c. statement of yearning/willing: part of me agrees that God's law is good, wants to follow it
- d. statement of powerlessness: "What I hate, I do"; part of me NEVER willing to sin, doesn't understand sin at all
- e. statement of bad behavior: BUT sin living inside me corrupts that and commits sins

2. Cycle 2: vs. 18-20

vs. 18-20 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.

- a. statement of problem with self... “nothing good lives in me... in my FLESH”
- b. statement of division: one part of me at war against another part
- c. statement of yearning/willing: part of me desiring to please God
- d. statement of powerlessness: “I cannot carry it out” “I keep on sinning” part of me agrees that God’s law is good, wants to follow it
- e. statement of bad behavior: BUT sin living inside me corrupts that and commits sins

3. Cycle 3: vs. 21-25

vs. 21-25 *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! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.*

B. Repeated Lessons

- 1. Indwelling sin very powerful
- 2. Immense struggle characteristic of Christian life
- 3. Law alone cannot sanctify
- 4. Christian is at the same time both righteous and a sinner
- 5. BUT Christian never ceases the struggle but continues to fight

IV. Law Leads to Christ, and Christ Gives the Spirit

A. “In order that sin might become utterly sinful”

- 1. Context is King
- 2. Paul explains how Law produced death in him
- 3. Ultimate end: cry of despair against himself AND statement of faith in Christ

vs. 24-25 *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!*

B. Law Leads to Christ

Romans 10:4 Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

Law crushed Paul and made him realize that he had to have a savior, and that Savior was none other than Jesus Christ Himself

THANKS BE TO GOD!!!!

vs. 24-25 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!

C. Present Experience

1. Who we really are: free forever
2. Who we behave like
 - a. acting like a slave
 - b. living in the flesh

Compelling power of Romans 7: this is MY experience!!! I wrestle with these same problems every day!!!

Thus Romans 7 a tremendous encouragement: just because I struggle with sin doesn't mean I'm not a Christian

Absolute statements of Romans 6 are true: I am not a slave to sin... sin has no authority over me

BUT the power of this body of death is such that we will wrestle its effects the rest of our lives

- c. exchanging freedom for slavery

Galatians 3:3 Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?

Galatians 5:1 It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

3. KEY is sanctification: how do we grow into daily conformity to Christ?
 - a. habitual (fleshly) answer: work it out by human effort... give me do's and don'ts

b. BUT such approach NEVER works... sanctification is the Spirit's work in us

Romans 7:6 But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.

C. The Sanctifying Power of the Spirit

This is the whole burden of Romans 7-8: how sanctification can only come by the power of the Spirit, not by fleshly obedience to the law

Romans 8:1-4 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

Galatians 5:16-18 So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. ¹⁷ For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

V. Application

- A. Be warned: everything we do is deeply tainted with sin
- B. Be humbled: you cannot control even your own self [unlike God]
- C. Be grieved: your sin is your responsibility... even more now that we have been set free from sin and have the law written on our hearts and the indwelling Holy Spirit
- D. Be instructed: the law cannot sanctify you
- E. Be assured: struggle with sin can be a good sign

