

The War Within, Part 2

Romans 7:14-25

Intro

“Stop telling gay people that if they come to Jesus, he will make them straight.”

So begins a recent article on desiringgod.com by author and hip-hop artist Jackie Hill Perry entitled “The Heterosexual Gospel”

In this article she insightfully writes about her experience of moving out of a lesbian lifestyle into fidelity to a Christian sexual ethic and by God’s grace became a wife and a mom but she provides us with a helpful warning about the way we communicate the gospel and what becoming a Christian means.

How does the true gospel change temptation? The day after Jesus saved me, I felt like a new person and the same person all at the same time. I was still very much attracted to women (and in many ways, I still am). I’d visit churches expecting to be encouraged. Expecting to be reminded of the power of the gospel in light of my temptations, but instead, I’d hear the lie that “deliverance” meant that I shouldn’t be experiencing those same temptations at all. That in my coming to Christ, I should be free from feeling like the old me.

But thank God for the Scriptures. In them, I read about Christ and how he was tempted in all respects but without sin (Hebrews 4:15). Imagine the revelry I experienced when I realized that God was tempted too. And how, if this was the case, I am to judge my position with God not by my temptations but rather by how I respond to my temptations (1 John 3:9).

Experience of grace - new person and same person at the same time - That is well said. What Jackie Hill Perry is digging into is what it means to become a Christian of which there has historically been much confusion. Our thinking about the gospel and the good news we proclaim is in error if we present the good news of Jesus Christ as that which instantly sets one free from sinfulness and into immediate freedom from sin and complete wholeness - because freedom from all sin and wholeness of soul and body is - that is what is known as heaven

When one turns from a homosexual lifestyle like Mrs. Perry, they may have new inclinations that lead into healthy complementarian marriage or they may please God by living a chaste life of faithfulness to Christ

When a drug addict turns from his self-self-centeredness to Christ it does not mean that they will never struggle again - it may happen - it may be a battle against cravings and temptations for the rest of your life - a battle that honors God and is empowered by his grace.

When the selfish man or woman trusts in Jesus Christ and turns from their sin it does not mean that they will instantly become selfless, generous, sacrificial people - certainly there will be a change in perspective and in desire but rather a battle begins to be fought.

As Christians we live in what theologians call the “already not yet”. We live in the already - the now of forgiveness of sins, fellowship with God in Christ but we there is a not yet that we look forward to - the return of Christ where he will consummate what he has begun in us. The future realities of the redemption of all things reaches back from the future and breaks into this moment with foretastes of

deliverance, peace, and healing but we are those who look forward with groaning for the revelation of the Christ from heaven who is bringing with him a world of love and joy in a new heavens and new earth

To become a Christian isn't to instantly be set free from all temptation and sin - it is to enter a war with sin. Whereas before we were at peace with our sin - in being born-again by the Holy Spirit we are raised to spiritual life, the law of God written on our hearts, a new creation with new God-wrought desires and passions and a new relationship with our sin - a war with sin.

In Romans 7 - Paul takes us into what this war within looks like. But listen, far from being hopeless and defeated God intends that we would look deeply into the realities of our sin and own our sin but then to look up from our sin to behold the grace and love and power of the risen Christ meeting us in our temptations and sin

Two Points describing the war within

1. The War
2. Our Deliverer

I. The War

- A. We saw last week, go back if you haven't listened, the divinely inspired apostle Paul describing what the reality of sin looks like as it works within us
 1. Indwelling sin confuses us

For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. (Romans 7:15)

2. Sin exerts influence over us

Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. [17] So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. (Romans 7:16-17)

Illustration: The golden orb weaver spider and the zombie wasp

3. Sin incapacitates us

For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. (Romans 7:18)

- B. As I explained last week this is a most controversial text over what Paul means when he says "I" - is he talking about his experience before he was a Christian or is he giving us a window into what is a normal Christian experience and while men and women of goodwill who take the Bible seriously are divided on this issue - the difference between a theologian and a pastor is that a pastor needs to make up his mind
- C. I landed on this is Paul the Christian and let me explain again several contextual reasons for my thinking

1. In v. 7-13 Paul describes his pre-conversion experience in the past tense but in 14-25 he speaks in the present tense which certainly lends a natural reading of our text to see Paul describing a present experience
2. In v. 21 Paul says "I delight in the law of God in my inner being" - NASB "I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man" - not just agree that it is good but delight and joy in it which is hard to gel with a non-Christian who Paul says of just a few verses

For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. (Romans 8:7)

- a) Cannot submit - dubious delight
3. His self-awareness and loathing of sin would not seem to represent the experience of one apart from the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and his desire to be delivered from sin seems more aligned with a Christian experience
4. If we remember the context of Paul's argument, we find that his main point in all of this is to show us that the Law is not sin - it is good - but it is incapable of justifying us - making us right before God - and indeed it is powerless to sanctify us in and of itself for through the Law comes knowledge of sin and condemnation because of our sin
- D. With that in mind we return to the text this morning - look at v. 21 - "I find it to be A law - not THE law - I find it to be a principle, an authority in my life that when I want to do right - evil lies close at hand.
 1. Paul says that when his mind and his will are engaged - I see what is good and right - I desire to do what is right but in this middle of this want this desire to do right there is something else working alongside it - evil lies close at hand - sin lies close at hand
 - a) Close at hand because as he already explained sin dwell in us - close at hand

If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it." (Genesis 4:7)

- (1) And we do well to remember that sin isn't just shortcomings and peccadilloes - it is *evil*
- E. V. 22 for - here's how it works - I delight in the law of God in my inner being - I have a deep abiding pleasure in the core of who I am - in the center of my mind and heart - such is the fruit of grace

Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day. (Psalm 119:97)

1. For the Christian - when our hearts awaken to his Christ by his grace - his commandment don't come to us as unbearable burdens that we sidestep but as the instruction of our heavenly Father whom we aim to please
 - a) The Law reveals his character and will for our lives - we want to hear him speak to us and instruct us

Illustration: The commands of police compared with those of a Father who loves us

- F. V. 23 - delight and joy in God's commandments but another law - another principle is at work alongside this delight - sin waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members
 - 1. One argument against this being a Christian - wait a second Paul didn't you say in chapter 6 that the when we trust Christ and are united with him by faith our slavery to sin is broken. Yes! But there are *experiences* of that old captivity in this life that we experience and must oppose

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. (Romans 6:12)

- 2. There is a part of me that opposes the internal delight I experience when I behold God's law and make it my aim to obey him
 - a) A war is waged against my will and desire - another law - another principle that captures my desire and my will - sin is at work confusing, exerting influence, at times overpowering my will and desire
 - (1) In my members - this principle and authority of sin dwells within me and it is at work subverting my desire to do what is right
 - (a) IOW becoming and existing as a Christian doesn't mean clear sailing from here into heaven - war within - an internal struggle that does not identify one as a weak Christian but rather this war is the badge of authentic faith - Paul says I pummel my body so that after preaching the gospel to others I am not myself disqualified

G. Application

- 1. Patience is delightful till my will meets with the real-life experience of other people and their desires frustrate mine - till the kids just won't listen or my spouse disappoints my plans - POOF
- 2. Humility is attractive until someone does not show us what we deem the proper respect - when others disagree or criticize
 - a) Or when the culture advances agendas that run contrary to God's will and humility becomes prideful self-righteousness
- 3. Purity is desirable till one frustrated, tired, discontent and looking for release or until another plucks at our need to feel loved and desired and we cave
- 4. Can't be a Christian without a hunger and thirst for righteousness - that is always the effect of grace but so often - along with our hunger and thirst for righteousness - our delight in God's righteous commands we find this other law - this principle of sin at work in us - inner delight - internal war

I struggle between two laws. God's law has been written on my heart, so that at the very deepest level of my being I really do 'delight in God's law.' But 'the law of sin' is still at work and there is a war being waged within me. I feel like a prisoner who has been set free and has crossed into friendly territory, but the enemy troops keep coming over the border and kidnapping me back into my old prison. (Christopher Ash, *Teaching Romans*, Vol. 1, p. 263)

- 5. Only those who have experienced this war know the sorrowful cry of v. 24 - in light of this war within and the many ways in which I fail to live up to God's righteous standards - the many ways I fail to live up to that which I desire to do - WRETCHED MAN THAT I AM! WRETCHED WOMAN THAT I AM!

- a) In and of myself - aware of my sin - as conviction and revelation of sin continues and we see something of the depth of how far down it goes - to our dismay we find it going covert - sin masking itself - cleverly hiding itself behind piety

Illustration: First experience with selfish ambition - fresh experiences at PC - notice my quality - like a paralysis - long walks praying and crying out to God

- b) Body of death - oh we know that death is sin's constant companion - we don't need a pep-talk or a helping hand to get us over the hump - oops made a mistake - sin is EVIL - NO when we understand and see our sin cry WRETCHED MAN, WRETCHED WOMAN THAT I AM we know and declare that we need to be DELIVERED!!!

II. Our Deliverer

- A. Oh, the sorrow we feel over indwelling sin - oh the sorrow we can often feel over our failures in sin and so we cry BUT it is grotesque and ungodly for our experience to simply be wretchedness without v. 24b - the wretchedness of 24a must lead us to 24b THANKS BE TO GOD! WE NEED TO BE DELIVERED - THANKS BE TO GOD! THANKS BE TO GOD! THANKS BE TO GOD FOR GOD HIMSELF DELIVERS US FROM THIS BODY OF DEATH!
 - 1. HOW DOES HE DELIVER US? GLAD YOU ASKED AND I AM HAPPY TO RESPOND - GOD DELIVERS US THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD!
 - a) How does he deliver us? In the most extraordinary way - we are sinful and in our sin we don't just experience personal wretchedness - in our sin we are in rebellion to God and instead of immediate and fierce judgment he has in this time before the return of Christ extended to us GRACE!
 - (1) In this Christmas season we remember specifically that the eternal Son of God stepped down from heaven to clothe himself in frail human flesh - born of a virgin - born in abject humility - born to bear the sins of the world
 - (2) The one tempted in every way as we are but without sin - the spotless lamb of God who willingly took our place - on the cross - the lovely and perfect one became sin as the horrific darkness and evil of our sin was placed upon the perfect Son - NOT ONLY OUR SIN - But the judgment of God for our sin - the wrath of God we have earned for our sin - exhausting wrath
 - (3) Raised from the dead victorious over sin and the grace - drawing people into his resurrection life through faith - union with him - Spirit supplied - our redeemer - OUR DELIVERER
 - (a) For those of us who live in the good of this grace - ever and alway thanksgiving!
 - (b) For he has promised us deliverance - he has secured our deliverance from death - He will deliver us from this body of death when he returns and we will be like him when we see him - glorified - freed from sin and death - foretastes of deliverance experienced now - looking to the consummation - THANKS BE TO GOD! THANKS BE TO GOD! For His deliverance of us is to the praise and glory of his name

Our God is a God of salvation, and to GOD, the Lord, belong deliverances from death. (Psalm 68:20)

- B. Paul asks who HAS delivered - who WILL deliver - directs our attention forward to the full and final consummation of our deliverance from sin and death but his grace is such that when we

wander in our sin - PRONE TO WANDER LORD WE FEEL IT - he comes to us and takes us and brings us back

Illustration: When we make the mad dash back to the electric chair of sin, he brings us back

1. Make no mistake - our future is full and final deliverance - yes there is Spirit-wrought progress in this life - there is growth in Christ-likeness by his grace - none of that progress merits right standing with God - all dependent on grace - longing for the consummation - for this war? Take heart - be of good courage - this war within - the victory is sure

Everyone has a war within themselves. We all want to live according to a high moral code, but none of us can meet the demands of our moral code. The reason for this is that inside of ourselves there is a desire for evil as well as a desire for good. Therefore, none of us can win the battle. But the battle changes when we become a Christian. The deepest parts of ourselves change so that for the first time our most inner being delights in the law of God. We move from a battle we cannot win to a battle we cannot lose. (Tim Keller, *The War Between Ourselves*)

2. We cannot ultimately lose this battle - for Christ has won the war and secured our deliverance

C. Application

1. What do we take away? Some point of application to consider.
 - a) Merits further study - recommendations
 - (1) John Owen - Sin and Temptation
 - (2) JC Ryle - Holiness
 - (3) Kevin DeYoung - The Hole in our Holiness
 - b) God does not reveal the awful reality of sin to make us wriggle in fear and condemnation - it is to magnify his mercy and grace

[15] The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. [16] But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. [17] To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. (1 Timothy 1:15-17)

- (1) When we see our own sin, we with Paul declare I'm the foremost - I'm the worst sinner I know - stop looking down our nose
- c) Sibbes - such is the nature of Christ that he looks at us in our remaining sin - our sin-stained efforts to please God and chooses to take and celebrate the good that is the fruit of his grace - he saves - he is patient - he is kind
- d) God intends that we would not make peace with this sin within us that seeks to kill us but we must take godliness seriously. Owen - be killing sin...To cast ourselves on Christ and receive grace and strength

We ought to end this chapter crying deeply and daily for the ongoing ministry of the Spirit of God in our hearts. (Christopher Ash, *Teaching Romans*, Vol. 1, p. 268)

- (1) Don't minimize - war against evil and death - get help - talk to a pastor - get into community - come into the light -with expectation that as you humble yourself you will experience grace - forgiving, empowering, strengthening grace
- (a) Chapter 7 is a true account of the Christian life - make no mistake the Christian life is not one of constant defeat - there is hope and victories - none meritorious - always depending on the imputed righteousness of Christ for our acceptance - but all to the glory of God
 - i) Romans 7 leads into Romans 8 next year - the work of the Holy Spirit - by the Spirit we kill sin
- e) Those who are aware of their own sinfulness in light of God's holiness we should be the humblest people in the world
 - (1) When we perceive the culture - are we harsh, self-righteous - stand on the truth of God's Word - humbly, kindly, mercifully
 - (2) Remember that evangelism is not the "good" people telling others how to live - it is sharing with our fellow sinners the good news of grace for sinners
- f) Longing for Christ's return - after the celebration of coming deliverance in 25a - Paul returns to the reality we will experience in 25b - I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin
 - (1) COME!
- g) The Lord Jesus Christ - thanksgiving - gratefulness in every season - he is our deliverer - he has come to us in our sin and loved us - he has saved us.

Illustration: Friend sharing - her face shined - I WANT YOUR FACE TO SHINE - GOD WANTS YOUR FACE TO SHINE!

Close

Christian - it has been well said - you are more sinful than you know and you are more loved than you imagine

The war within is not a sign that you are under the condemnation of God but evidence that God's grace is at work in you

Don't give up! Don't give up! Look to Christ who condescended took on flesh to ransom us - to deliver us - look to him and fight this war that you cannot lose. By his grace for his glory

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