

Episode 124

Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death?

- Romans 7.24

Paul says that as a Christian, redeemed by the grace of God, there is now something within us that wants to do good. Unchained from our old lives, we find within us a recognition of the Law, because the Law describes God's holy nature. There is something within us that says what the Law tells me to do is right, and I want to do it.

But at the same time, he says, there is something else within me that rises up and says "No!" Even though I determine not to do what is wrong, not to give in to those old habits, distractions, or temptations, I suddenly find myself in such circumstances that my determination melts away, my resolve is gone, and I end up doing what I had sworn I would not do.

So, what is wrong with me?

Paul's explanation is, "It is no longer I who do it; it is sin living in me." Isn't that strange? There is a division within our humanity. There is the "I" that wants to do what God wants, but there is also the sin that dwells within me. Human beings are complicated creatures. We have within us a spirit, a soul, and a body. These are distinct. Paul is suggesting here that the redeemed spirit never wants to do what God has prohibited. It agrees with the Law, that it is good. And yet there is an alien power, a force that he calls sin, a great beast that is lying in the shadows until touched by the commandment of the Law. Then it springs to life, and we do what we do not want to do.

This is what we all struggle with. It's a battle we are all too familiar with, and unfortunately, we are also familiar with the crushing condemnation that comes with it. The cry of the heart at that moment is: "What a miserable person I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" But this is where we are to stop. Right here you arrive at where Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven". Blessed is the one who comes to the end of themselves. Blessed is the one who understands their own spiritual bankruptcy. Because this is the point — the only point — where God's help is given.

This is what we need to learn. If we think that we have got something in ourselves that we can work out our problems with, if we think that our wills are strong enough, that we can control evil in our lives by simply determining to do so, then we have not come to the end of ourselves yet - until, at last, out of our failures, we cry, "O what a miserable person I am!"

Sin has deceived us, and the Law, as our friend, has come in and exposed sin for what it is. When we see how wretched it makes us, then we are ready for the answer: Jesus Christ our Lord.

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