



BETHEL  
PRESBYTERIAN

# MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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## The Battle for Holiness, Part 4

This past month we have been looking at the issue of Holiness from Romans 6-7. Thus far we have seen:

- Having been saved by the cross of Christ holiness now has become our passion, Romans 6:21-23! Truly while holiness will not make us
  - Happy.
  - Joyful.
  - Content.
  - Satisfied.

Nevertheless holiness is a *necessary cause* for these things. Recall that while a good mattress does not guarantee a good night of sleep, you can't have a good night of sleep without one. And so it is with holiness as it relates to the benefits of salvation.

Romans 6:22: "But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life."

In light of this, as children of God we naturally have a passion to be holy.

- We then looked at Romans 7:14-20 where we saw that holiness not only is our passion, but it

also is our calling! Here much time was spent discussing the state of the man pictured in this passage: saved or unsaved? The conclusion is that Paul here is writing as a believer and so describing the struggles he had with indwelling sin.

Note: If you should have a problem with this, look at the many other passages of scripture in the Bible that describes the genuine child of God. What is said here in Romans 7:14ff is repeated numerous times in such passages like Matthew 5:3ff, Galatians 5:17ff, 2 Samuel 11; Psalms 32 and 51;

- With that we transitioned last week into a discussion of Romans 7:21-24 and The Believer's War in which the following observations were made that when God called us unto salvation He called us to lifetime of struggle against sin- we're going to return to this again today. As it relates to this battle, we are not going to achieve victory by ourselves; that is gained only by the power of the Spirit of God. Finally speaking of the victory we will enjoy by the Spirit of God, all advancement in progressive sanctification will come about via the tools made available to us: prayer, Bible study, Christian fellowship, service to others, and the sacraments.

With this, we approach our text today in which we examine Paul's summary of his discussion on holiness in which he give us An Anatomy of the Child of God, Romans 7:24-25. As Christians engaged in this battle, how ought we to view ourselves?

### *Slow Motion*

Years ago I watched a television program put out by the *National Geographic Society*. It was a special on slow motion photography in which they filmed assorted events with a high speed camera, and then replayed these events at a much slower speed. They show-cased

- The flight of a hummingbird.
- The dripping of milk into a saucer.
- The explosion of a bomb.
- The firing of a gun.

Each of which revealed an amazing amount of information that could be used for further research. Now I don't know about you, but a program like this gives me a desire to "slow down" what we see when we look at the Christian, and then examine a still frame of his anatomy. Imagine what we would see? We would see the child of God as he really is:

- Free of his defenses.
- Separate from that which covers his true identity.

Most likely, we would be shocked and amazed at the misconceptions we held previously. And yet, we no doubt would be better equipped to live in this present state.

### *Recognizing Ones True Identity*

This morning, the passage at which we are looking gives us a still-frame depiction of the child of God. It

pictures the Christian separate from the defenses that would hide his true identity. It describes the Child of God as he really is- warts and all! Let's examine this text and derive a clearer understanding of An Anatomy of the Child of God. Notice v. 24 and the first element we learn here: The Child of God is one who recognizes his true identity.

Romans 7:24, "wretched man that I am."

Paul uses a very important term here, *talaiporos*. It is a combination of two Greek terms: *tlaō*, to bear, undergo; *poros*, a hard substance, callus. Together, they carry the idea of being extremely distressed and miserable. The word is the opposite of "blessed" which carries the idea of "to be envied." Something that is wretched is something to be pitied.

Now when it comes to being "wretched" it is important to note that this is the general condition of all mankind. On account of our sin and our fallen condition, ALL are wretched/to be pitied! See, God created us in order that we might enjoy a love relationship with Him, that's part and parcel of the covenant of works. Accordingly, the Lord fashioned man and placed him in a world created to reflect, enhance, and encourage this relationship.<sup>1</sup> Yet, in Adam we rejected God and so are left with the shadows, signs, and reflections.

As a result, mankind seeks form this world that which only God can give them, and in the process denies/ignores God; which is what keeps them from longing after Christ.

Romans 1:22-23: "Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures."

Proverbs 14:12: "There is a way *which seems* right to a man, but its end is the way of death."

Proverbs 30:12: "There is a kind [of man] who is pure in his own eyes, yet is not washed from his filthiness."

That's the condition of every man outside of Christ. They are wretched, but they do not see it. They are blind and so proclaim "peace and safety" in the face of God's wrath. Accordingly, listen to James' call to repentance...

James 5:1-3: "Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you [the noun is used here, *talaiporia*- "howl for your wretched condition]. Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure!"

The very things that would make a "wretched man" boast in this world (riches, beauty, health) are the very things that add to their wretched condition- for these things can never satisfy. That is the miserable state of the "wretched." Now mark it! According to this text, it is the child of God who recognizes this fact about themselves! In fact, it is this that separates the Christian from the non

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<sup>1</sup> cf. B. B. Warfield's teaching on General Revelation.

Christian: while both are “wretched” it is the Christian who affirms this truth! Accordingly, notice another one of James’ call to repentance...

James 4:9-10: “Be miserable [the verbal form, *talaiporeo* — in other words, ‘recognize your state and so...’] and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.”

The child of God is one who recognizes his true identity before God. Of all people, they understand that they are

- Void of any spiritual good.
- Bankrupt when it comes to the kingdom of God.
- Incapable in and of themselves of any blessing.
- Sinful, depraved, and disobedient.

This is the testimony of all Christians: “I myself am Wretched!” And such clearly was the testimony of Paul in this text:

- Romans 7:14: he said that he was, “sold into bondage to sin.”
- Romans 7:17: Paul spoke of “indwelling sin.”
- Romans 7:19-20: that “indwelling sin” at times seemed to be that which directed him in his life!
- Romans 7:23: in fact, it made him “a prisoner” such that...
- Romans 7:18: the apostle could emphatically say, “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh...”

Truly, Paul- as any Christian- knew full well his own wretchedness which is why he continued:

Romans 7:24, “who will set me free from the body of this death.”

As a rhetorical question, this has the implied answer of “No one!” As Christians we know that we cannot save ourselves. For we live in this current state with a “body of death!” Now by “body of death” Paul had in mind the same concept that he has used throughout this section. It is equivalent to “flesh” (v. 14), and references that part of his being that had yet to be redeemed by Christ and which found itself subservient to sin.<sup>2</sup> Now that Paul uses this phrase is rather interesting, for note<sup>3</sup> near the city of Tarsus where Paul grew up, a certain ancient tribe had a particular way of sentencing convicted murderers. The corpse of the slain person was lashed tightly to the body of the murderer. In a few days, the decay of the person he had slain would infect and kill the criminal.

Now whether or not this served as the background for Paul’s use of “body of death” is impossible to prove. However, the illustration is quite appropriate. ALL of us are as the criminal of Tarsus. We have been inseparably united with a “body of death.” And it is this “body of death” that destroys/infects/taints us!

Such is the doctrine of man that you and I profess this day. Such is part and parcel of our self-testimony.

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<sup>2</sup> Compare also, Romans 7: 17, 18, 20, 21, 23a, 25

<sup>3</sup> Cf. John MacArthur’s commentary on *Romans 1-8*, pg. 392.

Though we have been saved by Christ, nevertheless we remain sinners/wretched, and so the appropriate object of pity. What we want to do... we don't! What we don't want to do... we do! And no one/man can change that.

Is that your identity this morning? Do you recognize

- Your "wretched" state?
- And that you can do on this side of the grave to alter it?

Are you convinced that in and of yourself

- You are not good enough?
- Nothing you can do is?
- You have more in common with the most heinous criminal, and the most irresponsible bum than you do with God?

To mistake this truth is to plunge ourselves into spiritual apathy; a state of "Who Cares?" in our walks with God.

Revelation 3:14 was letter was written to a church that stood in the most dangerous of all positions before God: Judged! The church at Laodicea professed Christ, and yet were living in their own strength. Now, what was the cause for this error?

Revelation 3:17, "Because you say, 'I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,' and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked."

See the believers in Laodicea failed to recognize that they were wretched people who could do nothing to save themselves or to maintain their salvation. They FAILED to recognize their true identity before God, and thus rather than seeking more of Christ they sat in a spiritual stupor!- *I'm good enough; what do I need more of Christ?*

If we fail to recognize our true identity before God is to plunge ourselves into spiritual apathy! Smart said,

"Let us cease to know that we are 'carnal, sold under sin,' sinners enmeshed in a sinful world, desperately in need of redemption- and all too quickly we shall be anchored in complacency."<sup>4</sup>

And that is why it is no surprise to find in Scripture that the one who does not

- Judge.
- Grumble.
- Complain.

Is content with what they have received in Christ in every situation! He is the one who genuinely

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Morris' commentary on *Romans*, footnote #117, pg. 296.

recognizes their spiritual poverty.<sup>5</sup> And so, let us strive all the more to recognize our true state before God wretched and miserable people! That we might ever and always seek Christ! And that leads us to a second description; the child of God is one who has been delivered through Christ.

### *Delivered Through Christ*

Romans 7:25, “thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

This is in reference to the question posed in verse 24, “Who will set me free from the body of this death?” Now the word for “set free” (*rhuomai*) is rich. It has the basic idea of rescuing from danger and was used of a soldier’s going to a wounded comrade on the battlefield and carrying him to safety. And so, on the battle field of holy living

- WHO will rescue us from sin?
- WHO will take me from my fallen and wounded position?

From the perspective of man, the answer is, “No one and nothing!” However, here we discover that while no mortal can deliver the sinner from the tyranny of sin; all are left to die in their sin on the battle field, Jesus Christ did, can, and does deliver us!

Romans 8:1-4: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.”

Hebrews 2:14-15: “Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.”

2 Timothy 4:16-18: “At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, in order that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was delivered out of the lion’s mouth. The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him *be* the glory forever and ever. Amen.”

As a result, Paul exhorted

Galatians 6:14: “But may it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”

Philippians 4:4: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your forbearing spirit [that is, ‘your gracious spirit that pardons other people’s sin because you yourself live in light of

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<sup>5</sup> Compare Matthew 5 and the Sermon on the Mount

the pardoning grace of Christ'] be known to all men.”

Do you see that which characterizes the child of God? Yes he recognizes his wretched condition, but he is not driven to despair. He knows that in and through all things Christ is with him, and so moment by moment he raises him up from the battle-field every time he falls in his war against sin.

So how do we grow in holiness? We tend to think that “a good bed will provide for a good night of sleep,” and so...

- We memorize Scripture.
- We attend worship faithfully.
- We strive for purity of life.
- We engage in fellowship with the body of Christ.

All the while thinking that thereby we will be content, happy, and growing in our passion for Christ. YET WE ARE WRONG to think this. The Pharisees taught this. Indeed! We must seek and long for Christ above...

- Marriage.
- Pleasure.
- Being fulfilled.
- Comfort.
- Riches.
- Security.

When this is that which propels us in our Bible reading, praying, fellowship, obedience, work, life, etc., we truly will grow in our walk with Christ. Now with all of this we finally are brought to Paul’s third and final description of the child of God, he is a servant in conflict.

### *A Servant in Conflict*

Romans 7:25, “so then [this draws Paul’s discussion to a conclusion], on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God.”

The teaching of this verse is not new. In Romans 7:22-23, Paul introduces us to the “law of his mind.” There Paul’s use of “mind” corresponds to the renewed nature, the “inner man” of verse 22. So the mind versus the flesh.

The distinction that is being made when “mind” and “flesh” are in contrast is not between the internal versus the external man. Rather, the distinction is between our redeemed nature versus our fallen nature.<sup>6</sup>

And thus we concluded that as a redeemed individual, the believer has been transformed such that he now wills, desires, and thinks as a new creature. Now in this verse, we learn that with his mind; his

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<sup>6</sup> Compare Romans 7:14, 23

redeemed nature, the Christian serves the “the law of God.” In other words, as a believer our heart’s desire is the fulfillment of the law! Don’t miss it.

- In Romans 7:12, Paul says that the Law is “holy, righteous, and good.”
- In 7:22, Paul says that he “joyfully concurs with the Law of God.”
- And in 7:25, Paul says that he is “servant” of the law of God!

In other words, the child of God is someone who is committed within the very core of his being to fulfilling and upholding the law which is the word of God and so the will of God.

1 John 5:3, “For this is the love of God [this is Christianity when it is mature], that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.”

To the one trusting Christ, the law of God is not a heavy yoke, but a delight and joy.

In fact, notice the level of his commitment. This verse identifies the child of God as one “SERVING” the Law. The word for “serving” is the word used to describe the work of a *doulos*- a slave! As the *doulos* was bound to a work and thus he served, so also Paul viewed himself as one who was bound to Christ and so he “served” Christ’s interests as outlined in God’s law! As Hendriksen put it, The Law of God “is the ruling principle for the expression of [the child of God’s] gratitude.”<sup>7</sup>

That’s “on the one hand.” But there is a flip side to the coin. Notice the second half of Romans 7:25.

Romans 7:25b, “with [our] flesh [we serve] the law of sin.”

This also is a summary statement. Heretofore Paul has established the truth that

- His flesh is NOT evil (Romans 7:21, 23; note that both read “in” not “of”), rather...
- His flesh is WEAK and strongly influenced by sin (Matthew 26:41)!

As such, our flesh is no match for sin. Any desire we might have to do good is easily overpowered by our sinful inclination to do evil! And thus, as children of God we find that at times we are in conflict! The things we want to do, we don’t. The things we don’t want to do, we do. It is as Paul said in:

Galatians 5:17: “For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.”

From all of this we see that as children of God we live in conflict! With the mind, we serve God. With the flesh, at times we serve sin. Of this we must come to terms.

See often times in our walks with God we are brought to a very low point; a point where we begin asking tough questions:

- Why is life so hard?
- Why is it so difficult to grow in Christ?

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<sup>7</sup> Hendriksen, *Romans*, NTC, pg. 235.



- If God loves me, why doesn't He purify me?

Yet, it is so sad that we do not come to terms with these questions at the *beginning* of our salvation!

- Life is hard!
- And the reason why is because the child of God has taken up residency in a war zone!
- Hebrews 12:3-4 talks about our "striving against sin."
- Romans 7:15: "...for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate."
- Galatians 5:17: "...the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another..."

In fact, not only is our flesh a servant of the law of sin. But the world in which we live is "in bondage" (Romans 8:19-20).

So why doesn't God deliver us today from the strife, the toil, the sin and misery of this existence? John Newton supplied the answer when he wrote the following:

I asked the Lord that I might grow in faith and love and every grace,  
might more of his salvation know and seek more earnestly his face.  
Twas he who taught me thus to pray and he, I trust, has answered prayer.  
But it has been in such a way as almost drove me to despair.  
I hoped that in some favored hour at once he'd answer my request,  
and by his love's constraining power subdue my sins and give me rest.  
Instead of this, he made me feel the hidden evils of my heart,  
and let the angry powers of hell assault my soul in every part.  
"Lord, why is this?" I trembling cried, "Wilt thou pursue thy worm to death?"  
"Tis in this way," the Lord replied, "I answer prayer for grace and faith."  
"These inward trials I employ from self and pride to set thee free,  
and break thy schemes of earthly joy, that thou mayest seek thy all in me."<sup>8</sup>

The conflict is indeed fierce, difficult, and hard. But, the conflict is good for do you see, in the life of the child of God it always leads to Christ! With that, let me close by talking to all who are weary and heavy laden; tired of the Battle! Rest is found not

- In the labors of our hands.
- In our good intentions: devotions, attending church.
- Even in the discipline of prayer.

Rest is found in Christ alone! And so my exhortation to you this day is if Christ is your Lord and Savior make sure that you are not settling for an imitation: Christian service, purity of life, the means of Grace.

Rather, through these means, seek Christ as His child:

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted in *A Passion for God*, pg. 106.

- Pursue a relationship with Him.
- Get to know Him.
- Be truthful with Him.
- And settle for nothing less!

And remember that in the kingdom of God conflict is the sign of vibrancy, not ill-health. Just make sure that the conflict leads you to Christ! And yet, if Christ is foreign to you, then you need a Savior! Go to Christ this day and

- Confess your sin.
- Agree with God's evaluation of your state that you are sinful and that you cannot save yourself.
- Ask God to forgive your sins on account of Christ.
- And then, follow Christ!
- And you shall be saved- released from the Slavery of Sin!

### **About Bethel Presbyterian Church**

*The Bethel Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word* is published regularly.

### **VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO**

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10<sup>th</sup> Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

All our sermons can be accessed via the World Wide Web. The recording for this sermon (the last few minutes were not recorded because of a power outage during the sermon) and these notes can be found at [This Body of Death](#). The web address for all sermons at Bethel Presbyterian Church can be found out as follows: <http://bethelpresbyterian.sermonaudio.com>

### **About the Preacher**

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on July 19, 2009. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.