

OKOTOKS EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

SEXUALITY IN OUR SEXUALIZED WORLD
CELIBACY—CHOICE, GIFT, OR IMPOSSIBLE?
NOVEMBER 1-7, 2015



MAIN POINT

The Holy Spirit empowers us to control our passions and put to death our sinful ways.

THINKING THINGS THROUGH

Connect the sermon to the study.

1. In the sermon this week, George talked about how controlling one's passions is the main issue a person faces when it comes to a life of celibacy. Which of George's points resonated with or challenged you?
2. What are some ineffective ways you have tried to control your passions (sexual, emotional, or otherwise) in the past? What did you learn about yourself and about the power of sin in the process?

Leader: Celibate or not, controlling our passions is something every believer must learn how to do. Throughout Scripture we read about the importance of self-control—it is included in Paul's list of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23)—and of putting to death our sinful desires (Col. 3:5). These desires go well beyond just our sexual passions and include everything from our emotions to our stress, anxiety, or even our spending habits. Self-control is essential in every area of our lives. Even though we were made brand new by Jesus, we still battle with sin, and the process of controlling our passions is a life-long pursuit.

DIGGING DEEPER

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ROMANS 7:14-25.

3. In these verses, Paul described the believer's struggle with the lingering presence of sin in a very personal way. To what extent do you identify with the struggles Paul expressed in these verses?
4. What is the inevitable outcome if we try to gain victory over sin just by trying really hard, or by obeying a certain law? What are we saying to God when we do this?

Leader: One of the benefits of salvation is freedom from the powerful grip of sin, something we talked about briefly two weeks ago. As Paul acknowledged in Romans 7, though, that freedom doesn't ensure we will never struggle with sin again. In Christ our inner, spiritual nature has been redeemed and made alive, but we also still exist in our fleshly nature. It is our fleshly nature, Paul taught, that continues to struggle with sin's power. When we try to live by the law of "don't do it," we will fail every time because the law serves its purpose in showing us we are sinners (Rom. 7:8,13). Thankfully, sin is not the master of the believer's life.

5. In the midst of Paul's testimony about his struggle with sin, Paul stopped to thank God (v. 25). What do you have to be thankful for as you fight against sin's powerful pull? How can gratitude, despite our struggles and defeats, empower you for the future?

Leader: Only the Christian would struggle with the knowledge that something was sinful and yet feel tempted to commit the infraction. When we compare our thoughts and actions to the perfect standard of God's law, though, we are reminded that we are sinners. This is the acknowledgment behind Paul's cry in verse 24, "What a wretched man I am!" In the same breath, though, Paul thanked God for providing the means of rescue for struggling believers through Jesus Christ, a point Paul carries into chapter 8. The more we focus on Jesus and His work on our behalf, the more we come to understand the cost of our sins and are motivated to put them to death (Col. 3:5), as George talked about on Sunday.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ROMANS 8:1-4.

6. In the midst of Paul's frustrating struggle that he described in Romans 7, what was Paul's hope? How do we live according to the Spirit?

7. What are the key differences between a life in sin and death and a life in the Spirit (vv. 2-3)? What characterizes each of these ways of living?

Leader: Because of Jesus' death and resurrection we now can live without fear of condemnation and in the power of the Spirit (see 8:1-2). When we try to live by our own laws of "don't do it"—avoiding sin—we fail every time because the law shows us we are sinners, which is exactly what it was intended to do. That was Paul's point in chapter 7, and in chapter 8 he provides the answer for how we live as those who have been freed from sin's grip. Living by the law of the Spirit means we realize we are covered in God's grace, and we listen and obey as He leads us through the Word and through those internal warning systems the Spirit informs and develops in us (our conscience).

8. Look again at the good news promised in Romans 8:1. How are we described in this verse, and what difference does that distinction make in our daily struggle with sin?

Leader: Paul described Christians as "those who are in Christ Jesus" (8:1). To be in Christ means that who we are and how we live are wrapped up in His identity as the sinless Savior who conquered sin and death in order to make us righteous before God. Therefore, our ability to live by the law of the Spirit is rooted in our relationship with Christ and the strength He gives us to live. Our identity is not tied up in our sin, because sin is not our master. When we are transformed by the powerful grace of God, He becomes our master and empowers us to control our passions and put to death our sinful ways.

DOING LIFE TOGETHER

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

9. Why do we need to take such a severe attitude toward our sin? What are some practical ways we can remind ourselves that sin is not our master, but our gracious God is?

10. How does knowing you can depend on God for victory over sin help as you live out your new identity in grace?

11. As a growth group, what responsibility do we have to one another in this effort? What step can we take toward self-control together as a group?

Leader: While not everyone will feel comfortable answering the last question during your group time, encourage your group members to find someone to connect with during the week to further your discussion. This may mean meeting one-on-one, or in gender groups.

PRAYER

Conclude your group time in prayer. Acknowledge in a general confession that all have known what is right but chosen to do what is wrong. Thank God for His love and grace in sending Jesus Christ to rescue us. Pray for your group members to discover that they can have victory over sin through faith in Christ.

FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

- ☐ Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
 - **Can you identify specific issues or aspects of life that tend to trip you up in your Christian walk? When have you had to confess to God, “I do not do the good I want to do”? How can you keep the grace of God at the forefront of your mind?**
 - **Do you make a point to give thanks to God for the victory He has provided through Jesus Christ? How will you do that in your private and public worship?**
- ☐ A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.
- ☐ The challenge to memorize Romans 8:1-2.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE PASSAGE**ROMANS 7:14-25**

Paul opened chapter 7 with an illustration of the meaning of being dead to sin and free from the law's condemning power. In marriage a woman is bound to her husband only as long as he is alive. If he dies, she is then free. Similarly, Christians are dead to and free from sin; but they belong to another—that is, to Christ. We are set free from the power of the law and can now serve God in the new way of the Spirit. The idea of becoming free from the law naturally raises some questions. If Christians have died to the law, then what good purpose does the law serve? Paul answered that the law makes us aware of our sinfulness. It diagnoses the spiritual problem. Therefore, the law is not bad; rather it is good and holy.

7:14. Paul's argument would often leave him open to a charge he undervalued the law and, in fact, made it something that was evil. That is not the case. In verse 7 the apostle had affirmed the law is not sin but it helps us identify the problem of sin. The law makes us aware of our sinfulness. Paul emphasized the goodness of the law again here in verse 14 by affirming the law is spiritual. The law, which provides moral direction for life, comes from God. It represents His holiness. Those who embrace only the law, however, and attempt to achieve righteousness through the law find that such efforts always lead to death. The law was meant as a diagnostic device, not as a cure.

If believers have been freed from sin (the cause of death) and the law is spiritual, then why do we still struggle with sin? Here Paul introduced a new factor—the telling factor—to the discussion. We still struggle with sin as believers because we are still made out of flesh. In Christ, our inner, spiritual nature has been redeemed and made alive, but we also still exist in our fleshly nature. It is our fleshly nature, Paul taught, that continues to struggle with sin's power. In fact, only the Christian would struggle with the knowledge that something was sinful and yet feel tempted to commit the infraction.

7:15-16. Believers face the oftentimes confusing, frustrating reality in which despite our best efforts, we fail to live for God as we want to do and instead do the things we hate. Our "want to's" are lined up with God's Word, but our fleshly nature still tugs us toward sin. Paul explained that this inner struggle in which our actions go one way while our "want to's" pull us toward God's Word is one more piece of evidence that the law is good. Paul's revulsion at sin is an affirmation that the law . . . is good. Again, the law serves the function of revealing sin. In this regard it is good. As a means of salvation, however, it is completely inadequate.

7:17. Interestingly, to struggle against sin also serves to confirm a believer's salvation is genuine. Unbelievers well might live as good citizens by obeying the nation's civil laws, but they don't struggle against sin. They are in bondage to sin and are spiritually dead (see Eph. 2:1). The believer, on the other hand, can truthfully say, "I am no longer the one doing it, but it is sin living in me." Such a statement should not be misunderstood as a skirting of accountability. Rather, it reflects that genuine believers never want to sin and do not make plans to sin. We falter, however, when we yield to the tug of sin's power remaining in our fleshly nature.

7:18-19. Thus the struggle believers have against sin is caused by the continuing influence of sin through the fleshly nature. We have the desire to (always) do what is good, but not the ability. Too often we fail to do the good we want to do and instead practice the evil that we don't want to do. This might aptly be called a believer's spiritual "growing pains." Verse 19 repeats the substance of verse 15. Paul's behavior bewildered and frustrated him. The tense of practice indicates an ongoing struggle.

7:20. Paul reiterated the conclusion he stated in 7:17. Christians' continuing struggle with temptation is not because God's law is faulty or because believers want to sin. The problem is sin itself. Sin's influence continues to reside in the fleshly nature. In Romans 8, Paul assured his readers that one day God will free believers from even that problem (see 8:23). At this point, however, he was carefully continuing his argument that the law, although good and holy, offers no solution to the struggle against sin. A new solution was necessary (see 7:6). Paul's carefully paced explanation of the believer's struggle with sin easily can leave the reader aching for a word of hope. In this section of verses, Paul built a bridge leading to an extended message of hope in Romans 8 concerning the Holy Spirit's work in Christians' lives.

7:21. As a result of his conversion and God's subsequent revelation of truth to him, Paul had come to understand a principle at work in believers' lives. The Greek word translated principle is *nomos*, which also can be translated as law. However, Paul was not referring here to discovering divine truth or Scripture but to understanding better the day-to-day experience of Christian living. In particular, he had come to understand that the Christian life was not automatic moral perfection but rather a struggle between one's desire to do what is good and the continuing reality of evil.

7:22-23. Old Testament writers and characters rejoiced in God's law (see particularly Ps. 119). Paul obviously concurred with this assessment as the words I joyfully agree with God's law indicate. Paul's agreement was in his inner self, a term that coincides with "mind," as will be clear in the following verse. In effect, there are two competing laws at work constantly in believers' lives. One is God's law, which we as Christians joyfully agree with in our heart of hearts. We know it is perfect, holy, and more desirable than any treasure (see Ps. 19:7-11). However, a different law still holds sway in our fleshly nature. The result of these two laws working at odds in the believer is nothing less than spiritual warfare (waging war). Pitched battles occur every time believers know God's will and want to follow through in obedience, for obedience is what God looks for in His people (see John 14:15; Jas. 1:22; 1 John 2:3-5).

7:24. Paul could delay no longer in giving voice to the desperate cry arising out of a believer's struggle with sin. "What a wretched man I am!" he exclaimed. The spiritual conflict is real and intense for all who take seriously their Christian faith and life. Paul continued by asking, "Who will rescue me from this dying body?" The body is the old sinful nature that wars against our mind, which is set on living in obedience to God. Take note that Paul did not ask "what" could rescue him but "Who."

7:25. Paul thanked God for providing the means of rescue for struggling believers: through Jesus Christ our Lord. Two opposing principles will always be at work in believers as long as we are in the flesh. However, because of Jesus' death and resurrection we now can live without fear of condemnation and in the power of the Spirit (see 8:1-2). Thus we can always depend on God to help us against sin and give us victory over it.

ROMANS 8:1-4

8:1-2. Paul's therefore ... now occurs this way only here in Paul's epistles. Coupled together, the two particles call attention to a turning point in Paul's epistle (see 5:1 and 12:1 for other major turning points signified by therefore). The main text of Paul's argument can be seen most clearly by skipping from 7:6 directly to 8:1: "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" (7:6). Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (8:1).

In Christ Jesus and "in Christ" occur 119 times in Paul's epistles. The other epistles add only four additional occurrences (none in Acts and the Gospels). It is fitting that the apostle who received the revelation of the mystery of the union of Jew and Gentile into one body should coin a phrase to describe those incorporated into one body by that union. The body is, of course, the body of Christ, the church (see Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12, 27; Eph. 4:12; Col. 1:24). But it is not the membership of all Christendom's organized churches. Rather, the body of Christ is that mystical body made up of those who have died together with Christ through faith, and have been made "one with him in spirit" (1 Cor. 6:17). Being in Christ Jesus means we are free from the law of sin and death which blocked our way to every other blessing which is ours in Christ. The law of the Spirit of life which Paul says has set us free from the law of sin and death is more of a principle, or controlling power, than a law (see Rom. 7:23).

8:3-4. When a prisoner is freed from condemnation and penal servitude, he or she is freed to something else. Regardless of where the prisoner ends up, at the moment of release he or she has been freed to life. Such is the transition from verses 1-2 to 3-4. If verses 1-2 are about position (freed from servitude to sin and death), then verses 3-4 are about practice—free to live according to the Spirit. It is here that Paul moves beyond his summary statement of chapters 6 and 7 (see Rom. 8:1-2) and continues his treatise on sanctification—the position of holiness (set-apartness) which is ours in Christ which forms the basis of our becoming holy in practice. These four verses are not unlike the position/practice parallel found in Ephesians 2:8-10: "by grace you have been saved, through faith ... to do good works."

All along, it was God's intent that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met [fulfilled] in his people. Unfortunately, a perfect set of requirements was given to an imperfect people. This was not a mistake on God's part; rather, it was part of a glorious plan to bestow grace and mercy on those who needed it most—those who had become enslaved by the nature they inherited from Adam and which had been revealed by the law. So the law had two purposes: to provide life and to reveal the death in man—man's sinful nature. Because the law had no power of its own, it could not overcome the power of sin in humankind. But in a sinless person, the law could be fulfilled since a sinless person has his or her own spiritual power by which to keep the law. What God did in Christ Jesus to overcome the dilemma of a perfect law being given to imperfect people was to send his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. God condemned sin in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us.

To return to the Old Testament roots of the necessity for the requirements of the law to be kept by those who would live, Christ condemned sin for that very purpose. In order that we might be credited with having kept the law, the one who kept the law perfectly sacrificed himself for us—those who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. Paul's point is not that Christ's condemning of sin is valid only for those who walk in the Spirit, as if walking in the Spirit were a condition to be met in order to receive the benefit of Christ's work. He is using the phrase to refer to believers in Christ; those who died and were raised with Christ.

Did God expect that we would keep the requirements of the law having been filled with the Spirit? That apparently was the intent of the new covenant promises in Jeremiah 31:33 (see Heb. 8:11-12), and seems as well to be Paul's intent as expressed later in Romans: "The commandments ... are summed up in this one rule: Love your neighbor as yourself. ... Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law" (Rom. 13:9-10). Freeing believers from sin and death means that they are also free from being controlled by the power of sin in our members.