

ROMANS 5-8: Living Your Life God's Way

The Believer's Struggle with Sin

Rough Transcript

Patrick Morley

Patrick Morley:

Hello men, and welcome to Man in the Mirror Bible Study. I'm Pat Morley, and today we're going to talk about the believer's struggle with sin. So please turn in your Bibles to Romans chapter seven, verse 14. Donald Miller has written a wonderful book called *Building a Story Brand*. In it, he talks about how every story can be boiled down to this, "A character who wants something encounters a problem before they can get it." For the purposes of our Bible study, the character is you, a man that you are seeking to help in his discipleship or perhaps a family member. A character who wants something. They want to lead a godly life. They encounter a problem before they can get it, and that problem is sin.

He goes on, "At the peak of their despair, a guide steps into their lives, gives them a plan and calls them to action. That action helps them avoid failure and ends in success." So let's take a look at the plan that God has given us for overcoming the believer's struggle with sin.

A STORY WITH A VILLAIN AND A HERO

The first thing we're going to talk about is a story with a villain and a hero. Now the question that calls the text that we're going to look at into existence is why do believers still struggle with sin and what can we do about it? In verse 14, we begin and we read, "We know," and this is Paul speaking. "We know that the law is spiritual, but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin." Just pause right there. What Paul has done here is he's saying that he has been sold as a slave to sin, and he doesn't mean by some random circumstances. He's talking about his own actions. He has sold himself as a slave to sin.

Sin in this text, it's very interesting, is personified. Sin becomes a slave master. So now we have a villain. Now we have something we can work with.

Verse 15, "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do, I do not do. But what I hate, I do." The next thing for us to understand here is whether Paul is talking about an unregenerate man or if he's talking about himself. Notice he says, "I do this. I don't want to do this, but I do it anyway." And all throughout the text, Paul says things like, "The law is good. I have the desire to do what is good. No good dwells in me. I want to do good. I delight in God's law. What a retched man I am. Who's going to deliver me from this body of death? I, in my mind, am a slave to God's law."

Paul is talking about himself. This is not an unregenerate man. This is a man who has faith, and Paul has put it in the first person because he's the one who is struggling with sin. No where else in scripture do we have a picture of a man struggling with sin like we're about to take a look at in this text.

So why did the Holy Spirit preserve this text? To give us this insight into a great Christian leader, the ultimate disciple maker who struggles with sin just like you and I do.

The third thing I want us to see... Well, the first thing that I wanted us to see here is that this is Paul. The second thing I want us to see here is that sin has been personified in this text, and that as a villain. He's a slave master, a ruthless slave master, a ruthless villain. And then I want us to also see third that the believers struggle with sin, your struggle with sin and my struggle with sin, that is part of the normal

Christian experience. I believe the Holy Spirit has preserved this text to give us a picture of Paul to help us understand that this struggle is part of the normal Christian experience. We saw it also in the life of Peter. Peter denied three times that he even knew Jesus. All of the disciples deserted Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, but he restored them. And he restores us too. We'll be getting into that more.

So let me go ahead and give you the Big Idea for the day. **You are not the villain. Sin is the villain, and Jesus Christ can be your hero.** You are not the villain. Sin's the villain, and Jesus Christ can be your hero. So how does that happen?

EVERY MAN HAS TWO NATURES, AND BELIEVERS A THIRD

The next thing I want us to take a look at then is how that happens. Every man has two natures and believers a third. Going to go ahead and throw up a slide here to show you that there are three natures that are possible. The first is the high you. You are the Imago Dei. You are made in the image of God. There's a high you, and then there is a low you because of the sinful nature. One way to understand this is I have a giant oak tree. We have a giant oak tree in our yard, and it has an evasive vine that keeps growing up the tree. And we keep having to pull it off. Well, why don't we just pull it out by the roots? The reason is that we can't pull it out by the roots because it has a bulbous root. Did I say bulbous? Yeah, bulbous root. And it is embedded into the roots of the oak tree. So the only way to get out the root of this invasive plant would be to destroy the tree itself. And that's how the sinful nature is. It's embedded within us, and we can't get it out without destroying the physical body.

So there is the high you, which is the Imago Dei, the low you, which is the sinful nature, and then there is if you are a believer, a third nature. The new you. The new creation. So what is it? Second Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away, the new has come." But as we're going to see in this text, you still have this old you, this sinful nature embedded inside of you.

So let's take a look at verse 16. Paul writes, "And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good." This is consenting to the goodness and the moral excellence of God's law. Verse 17, "As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it." In other words, not his higher self. "But it is sin living in me." It is the lower self. He's not shirking responsibility here. He's simply explaining what's going on. He's not justifying sin. He's simply explaining what's happening in his life. Sin is living in him.

Verse 18, "For I know that good itself does not dwell in me. That is in my sinful nature. For I know," speaking about his high you, "that good doesn't dwell in me. That is in my sinful nature," and that's his low you.

Reading on, "For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out." We know that Paul is speaking here. We know that Paul is speaking here because he says, "I'm the one that has the desire to do what is good."

Verse 19, "For I do not do the good I want to do." Are you relating here? "For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do. This I keep on doing." Paul here now is not talking about habitual sin. He's talking about the occasional sin that we all do every day in different ways, in thought, word, and deed. In previous messages, we've talked about Paul saying, "Should we continue to sin so that grace may abound by no means." And when he says, "continue to sin," he's talking about habitual sin. So he's not talking about habitual sin here necessarily. But of course it could be, right? But he's talking about the every day sins.

Verse 20, "Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it." In other words, my high you that's doing it. "But it is sin living in me that does it." It's the low you. It's the sinful nature.

Verse 21, "So I find this law at work." It's the law of spiritual warfare. "I find this law at work. Although I want to do good," that's the high you, "evil is right there with me." And that is sin. That is the villain.

That is the slave master. He's right there with us speaking to our sinful nature. And you know in this life, in glory with God, we're not going to have this sinful nature anymore, but in this life, we will have it. So it's kind of like we do get better, but it's akin to cutting a piece of string in half. No matter how many times you cut it in half and throw away the half you cut off, you always still have half left. So our sins do go down. We do get better. We do become more righteous. We do increase, but it's always going to be there.

Verse 22, "For in my inner being," the high you, "I delight in God's law. But I see another law at work in me," and this is the law of spiritual warfare again. "But I see another law at work in me waging war against the law of my mind," my high self, "and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me." In other words, he finds himself from time to time captured or recaptured by this villain that is sin.

Verse 24, "What a retched man I am." In this case, he's not talking about being a sinner who is beyond hope. But rather when he uses the word retched here, it means afflicted. I am an afflicted man. What an afflicted man I am. What a miserable man I am. I'm torn. I'm distressed. I'm in despair of sin. I ache for Jesus. In a previous talk, we've talked about how can a man ever come to Jesus unless he has a sense of despair about his sin? Paul says, "What a man in despair I am."

And now we get to the hero of the story. "Who will rescue me from this body subject to death?" And then in verse 25, the third nature, the new creation. He speaks out of the new creation. "Thanks be to God who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord." Jesus Christ gives us victory over the death of sin. Jesus Christ is the liberator.

Reading on, "So then I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law," that's the high self. "But in my sinful nature, a slave to the law of sin."

So how is it that Jesus Christ then becomes the liberator for us? He does that. We see it in Philippians chapter two, verse 13, "For it is God who works in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure." God does this through the power of his Holy Spirit. The spirit of Jesus Christ that lives within you is giving you the power to be delivered from this body of death.

The Big Idea today, **You are not the villain. Sin is the villain, and Jesus Christ can be your hero.**

WHAT THIS MEANS WHEN YOU ARE MAKING DISCIPLES

Finally, then, let's talk about what this means when you are making disciples. First, I want to talk about what it means when you're making a disciple of yourself. First Corinthians chapter 10, verse 13 says, "No temptation has overtaken you except that which is common to man," including Paul. "But God is faithful and will not let you be tempted beyond what you are able to handle. But with the temptation will provide a way of escape, and that is through the liberator, Jesus Christ." He's the hero, and he will help you through the Holy Spirit to conquer this villain that is sin.

Then we all know even though we have this opportunity to escape temptation, a lot of times we go ahead and sin anyway. First John chapter one, verse nine says, "If we confess our sins, God is faithful, and he will forgive our sins and cleanse us of all unrighteousness." Jesus Christ through his atoning death on the cross has already paid the price and forgiven all of your sins past, present, and future. So you have in one eternal sense already been liberated from the slave master. But even when you do go ahead and sin, you can confess those sins and enter back into fellowship with God.

So that's for you. Now let's think about for the man you're trying to disciple or maybe someone in your family. Think about someone in your family or in your circle of friends that's making bad choices. No man, no family member, no one fails on purpose. When men get up in the morning, the men that we're in association with, they're looking for a win. They're not villains. Sin is the villain, and Jesus Christ can be their hero too. So we need to first of all not be judging men for doing what the natural man does, what the low you does. The man who only has the sinful nature, and then through his determination

from time to time can live the high you life, the Imago Dei. But he's not the new creation yet, so he's going to not be able to have Jesus Christ as his hero until he puts his faith in Jesus. You can tell men with confidence no matter how sinful they are, you can say to men, "You are not the villain here. Sin is the villain. But Jesus Christ can be your hero. Would you like to know more about that?"

And then I think finally, just besides all of that, nobody's really attracted to somebody who's angry at them because they can't get their lives put together. They just think your judgmental or I'm judgmental or we're judgmental when we do that. The real solution to all of this is to understand this text that Paul is talking about himself. He's talking about you. He's talking about me. We don't do what we want to do all the time. What we don't want to do, we end up doing, and the text says, "So I find this law at work. Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me." And that's what men around us and family members and others that we might want to help, they are experiencing that too.

If they have the high you, the Imago Dei, and the low you, but they don't have the new you, the new creation, then struggle with that. But even if they have the new creation, from time to time, just like Paul, they're going to fall into sin because sin is a normal part of the Christian experience. Sin is a part of the normal Christian experience.

The Big Idea for today is you are not the villain. Sin is the villain, and Jesus Christ can be your hero but you have to ask him to do it. Let's pray.

Our dearest father, thank you for Paul's incredible transparency, his willingness to open up his own life to us here so that we can see that sin is part of the normal Christian experience. But also, that you have given us a liberator, a hero to rescue us from the villain that is sin that is stuck inside of us like a bulbous root that we can't get out, even though we would love to do it. I pray, Lord, that you would help each of us to have this image in our minds of how the sin nature works with the new creation that we have in Jesus Christ. And that we would understand that by depending on him and his power, we can be delivered from this body of death. We ask this in your name, Jesus. Amen.

Thank you, men.