

Hidden Hills *Missionary* Baptist Herald

"Preaching Jesus Christ crucified, buried, and risen to a condemned world"



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You cannot do the things that you would

By Forrest Keener

*This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that **ye cannot do the things that ye would.** But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. (Gal 5:16-18)*

In the March *Keener Thoughts* I asked the question: "Does that mean we cannot do the good we will to do, or that we cannot do the evil we might do?" The answer I gave was this. "It applies to each of these as certainly as to the other." In this month's article I want to discuss how, and to what extent, this inability applies to each of these categories of activity.

Before regeneration, there may be influences, such as family and cultural tradition that, to some extent, restrain and influence us to good, but essentially we are slaves to sin. Law is always there, not

as a guide that can effectively guide us into righteousness, for it cannot do that, but it stands as our accuser and prosecutor. This is established in Galatians 3:21b, "*for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.*" Law's effect is altogether, and always, to

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O, wretched man that I am . . .

By Leon King

"O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with flesh the law of sin" — (Romans 7: .24, 25).

This is not the cry of the Apostle Paul before he came to know Jesus Christ as savior. It is not the cry of Saul of Tarsus! It is the bitter lament of one who had drawn near to His precious Lord.

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state guilt and condemnation. That is what it means to be under the law, that is to say, as slaves, in bondage under a slave master. The law is not an evil, abusive slave master but a righteous one.

God's law is just and holy and good, but we are by virtue of our birth sold under sin; therefore, by that very virtue of the law's holiness, it accuses, convicts and condemns us. But after regeneration, the Spirit of Christ dwells in us, and our whole relationship to the law changes. The Holy Spirit within us promotes in our hearts the very things the Holy law demands. (Gal. 5:22-23) But while the law demands righteousness of us, it can never

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motivate our hearts in the direction of that righteousness, nor can the law give us the ability to obey it. Our flesh is still the slave of sin, so we are left with a lifelong conflict of a dual nature, each lusting against the other.

While some honest theologians deny this, claiming that the regenerate are altogether in the spirit, and not at all inhibited by the flesh, I believe Paul insists upon what I have just stated. In

our flesh there is the incurable appetite for sin, but in the Spirit, (the inward man) there is a delight in God's holy law, which never is, nor indeed

can be in the natural man. Thus, we begin to understand the limited inability to do evil, because of the Spirit within us, and the limited inability to do good, because we are not yet delivered from the body of this death. (Ro. 7:22-25) *For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.*

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You cannot do the things that you would-Cont'd

I can honestly say I do not want to be guilty of any improper anger, any jealousy, pride, selfishness, impatience, arrogance, failure in loving others, etc. But when I behold those things in others, I am embarrassed to involuntarily realize that they are in me also. I am, no doubt, in some ways a fool, but not fool enough to be blind to, or ignorant of, these fleshly things in myself. I often wake up at night, having dreamed of, or thinking of, a Scripture or biblical issue, concerning which I am not satisfied with my depth of understanding. Lying there in the dark, I frequently purpose that I will get up in the morning and study the context more carefully, or read some good commentary on the issue. I feel that I must know more clearly what the inspired writer, through the Holy Spirit, is revealing to us. But when the morning comes, I find many things, yes, fleshly interests, that lure me away from that study and monopolize my time, and I go to bed as ignorant as I was the night before and that unnecessarily.

Knowing that is true, how can I possibly claim that I am not in some sense in the flesh as well as in the Spirit? If you have a formula by which you are able to deliver yourself from such fail-

Now I hear someone say, "Oh I just set me a goal of hours I will pray or chapters I will read, or visits I will make, and that gives me the victory." No my friend, I have already lived there!

ures, help me out. Now I hear someone say, "Oh I just set me a goal of hours I will pray or chapters I will read, or visits I will make, and that gives me the victory." No my friend, I have already lived there! That only builds a sanctimonious wall to protect us from the conviction of the Spirit.

It helps us put a spiritual label on our fleshly ambition, and blinds us to our persistent neglect of God, and justifies our jealousy, pride, selfishness, impatience, arrogance, failure in loving others, etc. If those good activities delivered us from fleshliness, the energetic Paul would never have needed to confess. *"But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.* I must join Him in saying, *"Oh wretched man that I am!"*

Now, having lamented the defeats we suffer because of the flesh, let me employ a few words to rejoice over the victories we have because of the Spirit of Christ that dwells in us. I mentioned the fact that this restraint of flesh and Spirit is not only from good, but is also from evil. That is to say, there are evil things that I would do, were I left to my natural self, but cannot do, because the Spirit of Christ dwells in me, lusting

You cannot do the things that you would-Cont'd

against the flesh, and refusing me, sometimes the will, and at other times the opportunity, to do the evil that I would.

At least, some of us are aware of the principle of what is often called prevenient grace. That is that grace of God which prevents us from doing evil things that we might be tempted to do. Many, many times in scripture, we see where even heathen were restrained by God, such as in the case of Abemelech in Gen 20:6. *And God said unto him in a dream, Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her.* How much more beautiful is this restraining grace, when it restrains us as Christians from doing foolish things that would negatively effect the rest of our lives.

I can recall many times during my ministry when God has done this for me, and even many times before I even realized my call to the ministry.

Looking back over forty-three years of pastorate and seven years of full time evangelism, I know more than ever that God's divine restraint and motivation has been my only source of survival. When I felt and answered the call to the ministry in 1958, I knew nothing, and I knew that I knew nothing. Through

more than fifty years of trying to serve God, I thought I was just stumbling along with God's word (perhaps His holy law) before me. The blessings of those years have been more than I even could have expected. However, today I am sure it did not come by my merely following divine instructions. I feel sure it was, and even now, perhaps more than ever, is the Spirit of Christ within me, both restraining and constraining me. Thus I do not the evil that I might, and I do some good that I neither would nor could, without the very person of Christ dwelling in me. What incredible grace that this could be true!



This article has been printed with permission of Brother Forrest Keener, former pastor of Bethel Baptist Church in Lawton, Oklahoma for forty-three years. In the past seven years, he has served as a full-time evangelist.

O, wretched man that I am—Continued

These are the words of a man who was born of God—one in whom a new man had been created in true righteousness and holiness. The unregenerate man is wretched indeed, but he knows nothing of the "wretchedness" here expressed. Why is that? It is simply because such a man knows nothing of the experience which calls for this wail.

O, wretched man that I am—continued

Those words come from the lips of a person who, by the presence of God within him, experiences a continuous conflict between what he ought to do and what he actually does. Every time, without exception, he would do good—evil is present with him. It happens every time because it is a law which operates just as surely as the law of gravity. It is the consciousness of this war or conflict within him, and this being brought into captivity to sin, which makes him cry, “O, wretched man that I am!”

The natural man—one who has not experienced the new birth—has no such conflict. He loves both self and sin. Apart from some twinges of conscience, he continues in his downward spiral toward utter destruction. Such a person continues in his sin and rebellion toward God insomuch that his conscience becomes seared with a hot iron.

When a person has continually violated his conscience, so that it is seared with a hot iron, he is past feeling. He cannot know this battle that rages in the mind of the saints of God. “The man who does not utter this cry daily is either so out of communion with Christ, or so ignorant of the teaching of Scripture, or so deceived about his actual condition, that he knows not the corrup-

tions of his own heart and the abject failure of his own life.” No, the closer one draws to the Lord Jesus—the more he takes in the precious word of God—the more he sees his own depraved nature. That fallen nature stays with the person who is regenerated or born again until the time when his body is changed and made like unto Christ’s glorious body. In the meantime, we are all plagued with the “body of this death.”

We have not yet been *adopted*, as many believe, but have received the *Spirit of adoption* whereby we cry Abba, Father. It is through the Spirit that we pray

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to the Father. In this body of humiliation, we groan—those of us who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body (Romans 8:23).

Until the redemption (resurrection) of our body occurs when our Lord returns for his

saints at the last trump, we shall continue to have a daily warfare with the fallen nature. In our flesh, we continue to serve the law of sin. Who, then, shall deliver us from the body of this death? Paul says, “I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Was the Apostle Paul alone in

O, wretched man that I am—continued

his view of himself. Nay, verily. Was not the patriarch, Job, brought to such a view of himself after his great trial? The Lord showed Job a view of both God and himself that he had not seen before. What did he say?

Job 42:5-6 *I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.*

What has been the experience of others? In this article, the writer has drawn heavily from *The Christian in Romans 7* by Arthur W. Pink. The following quotes from imminent believers are found in that article. Jonathan Edwards, in whose home died that remarkable man Mr. David Brainerd (the first missionary to the Indians, and whose devotion to Christ was witnessed to by all who knew him), and with whom he was intimately acquainted, says in his "Memoirs of Mr. Brainerd," "His religious illuminations, affections, and comfort seemed, to a great degree to be attended with evangelical humiliation; consisting, in a sense of his own utter insufficiency, despicableness, and odiousness; with an answering disposition and frame of heart. How deeply affected was he almost continually with his great defects in religion; with his vast distance

My short-comings and my mis-doings, my unbelief and want of love, would sink me into the lowest hell, was not Jesus my righteousness and my Redeemer

—

Augustus Toplady

from that spirituality and holy frame of mind that become a child of God; with his ignorance, pride, deadness, and barrenness! He was not only affected with the remembrance of his former sinfulness before his conversion, but with the sense of his present vileness and pollution. He was not disposed only to think other saints better than he; yea to look on himself as the worst and least of saints; but, very often, as the vilest and worst of mankind."

Augustus Toplady, author of "Rock of Ages," wrote thus in his private diary under December 31, 1767—"Upon a review of the past year, I desire to confess that my unfaithfulness has been exceeding great; my sins still greater; God's mercies greater than both." And again, "My short-comings and my mis-doings, my unbelief and want of love, would sink me into the lowest hell, was not Jesus my righteousness and my Redeemer."

Listen to the words of that godly woman, the wife of that eminent missionary A. Judson: "Oh how I rejoice that I am out of the whirlpool! Too gay, too trifling, for a missionary's wife! That may be, but after all, gaiety is my lightest sin. It is my coldness of heart, my listlessness, my

O, wretched man that I am—continued

want of faith, my spiritual inefficiency and inertness, by love of self, the inherent and every-day pampered sinfulness of my nature, that makes me such a mere infant in the cause of Christ—not the attractions of the world.”

John Newton, writer of that blessed hymn, “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me; I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see;” when referring to the expectations which he cherished at the outset of his Christian life, wrote thus: “But alas! these my golden expectations have been like South Sea dreams. I have lived hitherto a poor sinner, and I believe I shall die one. Have I, then, gained nothing? Yes, I have gained that which I once would rather have been without! Such accumulated proof of the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of my heart, as I hope by the Lord’s blessing has, in some measure, taught me to know what I mean when I say, Behold, I am vile. . . I was ashamed of myself, when I began to seek it, I am more ashamed now.

James Ingliss (Editor of *Waymarks in the Wilderness*) at the close of his life, wrote Mr. J.H. Brookes, “As I am brought to take a new view of the end, my life seems so made up of squandered opportunities, and so barren of results, that it is sometimes very painful; but grace comes in to meet it all,

and He will be glorified in my humiliation also” (1872). On which Mr. Brookes remarked, “How like him, and how unlike the boastings of those who are glorying in their fancied attainments!”

One more quotation: this time from a sermon by the late C. H. Spurgeon. Said the prince of preachers, “There are some professing Christians who can speak of themselves in terms of admiration; but, from my inmost heart, I loathe such speeches more and more every day that I live. Those who talk in such a boastful fashion must be constituted very differently from me. While they are congratulating themselves, I have to lie humbly at the foot of Christ’s Cross, and marvel that I am saved at all, for I know that I am saved. I have to wonder that I do not believe Christ more, and equally wonder that I am privileged to believe in Him at all—to wonder that I do not love Him more, and equally to wonder that I love Him at all—to wonder that I am not holier, and equally to wonder that I have any desire to be holy at all considering what a polluted debased, depraved nature I find still within my soul, notwithstanding all that divine grace has done in me. If God were ever to allow the fountains of the great deeps of depravity to break up in the best man that lives, he would make as bad a devil as the devil himself is. I care nothing for what these boasters say concerning

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Don't build your house on the sand!

O, wretched man that I am—continued

their own perfections; I feel sure that they do not know themselves, or they could not talk as they often do. There is tinder enough in the saint who is nearest to heaven to kindle another hell if God should but permit a spark to fall upon it. In the very best of men there is an infernal and well-nigh infinite depth of depravity. Some Christians never seem to find this out. I almost wish that they might not do so, for it is a painful discovery for anyone to make; but it has the beneficial effect of making us cease from trusting in ourselves, and causing us to glory only in the Lord."

Beloved, the experience of the writer is just the same as the Holy Scriptures teach—and as others have experienced through the ages. The battle rages daily. Some days are worse than others, of course, but the war is always there. This writer is assured that if the Lord

Schedule of Services

Sunday Worship.....12:00 PM
Wednesday Prayer..... 7:00 PM
Our meeting house is located at 50130 S. Caswell Loop just south of the intersection of Bendapole Road and Passthebait Avenue

had not intervened in his life, he could have been worse than the worst of the worst. There is within each of us such depravity that not a whit is untouched. We are deeply fallen and inherently depraved in every facet of our being. Indeed, we are dead in trespasses and in sins. How desperately men need a savior! Therein is the good news—the gospel where both life and immortality are brought to light!

1 Corinthians 15:3-4 *For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:*

Our hope is the Lord Jesus Christ, — the eternal Son of God — not ourselves.

