

Why Can't I Get it Right

¹⁵ I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ¹⁶ And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸ For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature.^[a] For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. ²¹ So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ²² For in my inner being I delight in God's law; ²³ but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. ²⁴ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature^[b] a slave to the law of sin.

“Hi my name is Steve, and I'm a sinner.” If the church were a 12-step program for sinners, then that is how we would probably start the service...er meeting. In my study of the function of the church, I've come to the conclusion that most of the function of the church is exactly that. The church is a support group, Sinners Anonymous. We are all cut from the same cloth and are deeply effected by the Fall of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. Tomorrow, we celebrate our nation's freedom. As people living under grace, God has set us free from sin. Paul reminds us that to live in freedom, it does not give us license to sin. The expensive price that was paid on the cross was not so that we can go out and live in violation of the will and purpose of God.

There was a debate a few years ago about flag burning. There was an amendment put before the congress where if it passed, it would constitutionally forbid burning an American flag in protest. The debate argued that if we were to forbid flag burning, we would in essence be taking away the very freedoms that soldiers fought and died for. The argument was that to burn a flag is an American right because we are a free society.

Certainly I'm not promoting flag burning. Quite the opposite. I would contend that one ought NOT to burn a flag in protest and desecrate it's meaning – because we have been given such freedoms UNDER that flag, that we should NEVER tread on top of that flag. We owe so much to what that flag signifies. We can say the same thing about the cross. Sin is in defiance of the cross and what Christ did there. Out of gratitude for what Christ did on the cross, we should seek to conquer and overpower the forces of sin. Furthermore, Just because you are free from sin, it does not mean you should engage in sin to prove your freedom. Instead, you are a slave to righteousness and that righteousness will set you free.

So we have to come to this question at some point in the discussion of sin. If Christ has set us free, then why do we continue to sin? Why is sin SO compelling? Robert Lewis Stevenson

wrote a novel titled The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Dr. Jekyll embarks on a strange journey of split personality and twisted fate when he invents a concoction that transforms him into villainous Mr. Edward Hyde. Mr. Hyde would delve into all kinds of sinister acts, selfish deeds, and undignified pleasure. Yet when the drug would wear off, he would become the model citizen, Dr. Jekyll. Dr. Hyde's fun and games end when he eventually commits murder. He is forced to choose which personality he wants to live under. He chooses to live as the good citizen Dr. Jekyll. One morning as he was sitting on a park bench, the good doctor's intentions go astray and he uncontrollably reverts to the detestable Mr. Hyde. Despite his intentions to remain good and pure, the depravity within his soul is unleashed, never to be tamed again.

Most Christians are not complete strangers to those kinds of struggles. Have you ever felt that war within you? In our text today, the apostle Paul seems to be having a similar struggle. Notice his words: ¹⁵ **I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.** Now I have some issues. They are related to my sinful nature. I'm not very patient in traffic. I want to get to where I'm going and I don't behave well when people are moving slow. I don't do well with aggressive telephone solicitors. I get aggressive back and can really pour on the sarcasm. I don't think it's within the best character of a Christian. I tend to procrastinate. My office is not always clean because there are other things I would rather do. Here is something else – I know I'm in good company. Not only do I have those flaws and evil tendencies, but according to Paul, so does he. I hate to break this to you, but SO DO YOU.

Bible scholars do not all agree on the meaning of this text. Some say Paul is not talking in the present tense but referring to his life before he was converted. Since there are references to him being under the law, they think this might be about his life as a Pharisee and persecutor of Christians. Here's the question? When we accept Christ, do we evolve into a sinless person? OR, do we struggle with sin throughout our lives?

I wonder if the answer to this question isn't based more upon human perceptions than on reality? Let me explain. Philip Yancy, in his book "What's so Amazing about Grace", tells about his own upbringing. In the church where he was raised, there was a heavy emphasis on the length of one's hair or skirt, and upon whether women should wear jewelry. Yancy does not recall any emphasis on things like racism, world hunger, or the plight of the poor and homeless. His point is this, is our vision sometimes focused too narrowly upon the petty and insignificant so that we miss the larger issues. Isn't our sin based more upon what we perceive to be sin? We aren't always honest in our perceptions. Paul seems to look very honestly at his own sin. "The things I want to do I do not do and the things I do not want to do, those are the things I do!"

Paul is describing here, his own ongoing struggle with sin. Would you agree? When you accepted Christ, did all the demons you had prior to knowing Christ simply disappear, or did you continue to struggle with sin long after you found Christ? Think about those who have made a commitment to Christ right here in this sanctuary, but have not been in church in

months or even years. They went back to their old way of living. Did grace fail? Did God's saving power fail? That is a difficult question. Compare it to moral failure. We have heard in the news recently about politicians who were engaged in extramarital affairs. Pastors and church leaders have done the same thing. What about the alcoholic. Does he know it is harmful to drink? Of course! What about the person quitting smoking. Do they know it is harmful? Yes, but quitting is very difficult. What about the person who is in major debt but they go out and buy another suit or another luxury. When you confront them on it, they say, "I know, I shouldn't have done it." So what's the answer? Do we simply give up because sin is too much of an enticement? We are too weak. We simply can't do it? NO.

When Paul asked the rhetorical question in chapter 6:15, **What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means!**", what did he mean? Paul did not give up. Scripture reminds us over and over that we can have victory over sin. We are slaves to righteousness and we have been set free from sin. So how do we do it? First, the Holy Spirit must have freedom to roam in our lives. The Holy Spirit is the spiritual janitor who roams within us cleaning up spills and making repairs. We have to give the Holy Spirit room to work by inviting him in through our prayer life. The Holy Spirit also has a spiritual LIGHT that is shone back into our lives to illuminate the problems so they can be fixed.

Paul realized "To Err is human". But he also recognized a solution. He knew that he was involved in a war and his flesh was weak. His solution was GOD. God could bring victory. He needed to confess his sin and become real with God, himself and others.

That is in part why we come to this table. We come recognizing that in many ways, we have failed and sin has been dwelling in us. We come, however, with confession in mind. We focus on the blood of Christ sacrificed for us, and it draws us back to the foot of the cross where we can confess our sin and be made clean. You do not come to this table as a perfect reflection of Christ, but rather with honesty and confession, you admit your failure and allow his spirit to be at work within you.