

## Spiritually Living, Yet Still Stinking

Selected Scriptures

80-332

Well again on behalf of me, I want to welcome you, so thankful that you've come to worship the Lord and fellowship and to study with us His precious Word. As I said this morning, I had the opportunity this week to go back to Orlando, Florida to be a part of the conference called The Ligonier Conference and the opportunity to minister the Word of God a few times and renew fellowship with other ministers, and to meet many, many Grace To You listeners. Folks even from our own church travel back to that conference, it was a real joy to see them as well and also rendezvous with some folks who were at the Shepherds' Conference the week before. So it was a rich time for me.

One of the assignments that I received was to give a message on the subject, "Simultaneously Righteous and Sinful." The old Latin phrase, *Eustus Et Peccatore* (???), an old theological phrase which virtually says that just or righteous and sinful.

This is necessary for us to understand because it's critical for us as believers to understand our true spiritual condition. We have to be dealing with reality. Nothing is more difficult than to live a godly life when you're not dealing with the reality of what is really going on. You have to start from the platform of a true understanding of your spiritual condition. And this will help us to do that.

I want to borrow another story from the Bible as an analogy to begin with, and then I want to borrow even another story at the end of the message, another analogy, to help us understand this a little better, using them as illustrations. Let's begin with a familiar story and I'll just remind you of it, you don't need to worry about it in terms of looking it up.

In the New Testament there is the wonderful story recorded in John 11 of the resurrection of Lazarus. Lazarus, you remember, had been dead for four days when the Lord Jesus finally arrived at his grave. From the standpoint of Mary and Martha, this was far too long. They were confident that Jesus had the power to heal his illness. They believed that He could heal Lazarus if He got there before he died.

Apparently they didn't have the same confidence about His power over death. But Jesus purposely delayed His coming. He delayed His coming until Lazarus died and then He delayed His coming four more days so that four days had passed since the death of Lazarus. This connects up with a tradition among the Jews that after four days, the spirit of the dead person no longer hovered over the dead person but had departed. Jesus wanted Lazarus to be dead from all perceptions. He waited in order that He might put on display the full scope of His power.

He went, you remember, to the grave of Lazarus and told the mourners to remove the stone which had been placed across the grave. It is then that Martha blurts out that rather familiar statement, and I'm sure she spoke King James English and in King James English it goes like this, "Lord, by this

time he stinketh.” I remember as a kid that was one of my favorite Bible verses. I memorized that one really early in my Christian experience and found a number of occasions to use it...out of context.

Anyway, she blurts out, “Lord, by this time he stinketh for he has been dead four days,” John 11:39. Jesus utterly ignored her concern and cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.” And I suppose it's a good thing He said “Lazarus,” cause He had so much power if He hadn't said “Lazarus” all the graves in the world would have emptied their victims because according to John 5 He has the power and will one day raise all the dead. But He qualified His command and limited it only to Lazarus, upon which the sight the mourners saw was this, Lazarus came out bound hand and foot with wrappings and his face wrapped in a cloth.

Essentially he came out a hopping mummy, standing there in grave clothes. Jesus said, “Loose him and let him go.” As long as the stinking grave clothes with the stench of death and decay, the Jews did not embalm, they only superficially placed some ointment, or some fragrant powder on the skin of the body which did not do anything to prevent the decay, as long as the stinking grave clothes were on his body, he would smell with the stench of death. He did stink even though he was alive and even though there was a freshness to his new life, he was wrapped in a stinking garment.

If I can borrow from that story simply an analogy, it is this...Lazarus offers a graphic illustration of our predicament as regenerate Christians. We have been raised to walk in newness of life. We've come out of the grave. Our old man has died and a new man has been born. Our old self is gone, we have a new self. This is recreation, new birth, regeneration. Yet we are still prisoners of a stench that remains from the grave. We're held prisoner by the remnants of our former life, our very fallenness clings to us. And though we live, we stink. It is as if we are bound in our grave clothes. That's the reality of our spiritual condition.

Well that's almost the reality of our spiritual condition, it actually is worse than that. Lazarus' death rags fell off in an instant. And as soon as he was separated from them, his new life was expressed in a fragrance. Lazarus' mummy rags came off immediately, they came off easily. After all, it was just a linen shroud, now rotted and decayed by the decaying of his body over the four days. Once it was removed, the stench was gone, the corruption of death no longer clung to him.

However, our predicament cannot be resolved so easily. Why? Because it is not just a linen shroud on the outside. It is not just something superficial that clings to us. It is not a shroud at all. In fact, the truth of it is it is a full-fledged dead carcass that is attached to us. And Paul in Romans 7 calls it “The body of this death.” It is as if we have come out of the grave a completely new creation, the old man is dead, the old self is dead. But that dead old self is attached inseparably to the new man. It is the presence of this sin that remains. And it is not just on the outside of us, it is all through us. That is why Romans 8:23 says, “We wait for the redemption of the body. We wait for the day when we are not just redeemed on the inside spiritually, but on the outside as well, and we lose this decaying, rotting, dead corpse that is attached to us from our former life.

It is true that in conversion you are a new creation. It is true that in conversion the power of sin has been broken, the dominion of sin has been broken. The sovereignty of sin has been broken. Sin is present with us no longer dominating us, but still present.

Turn in your Bible to Romans 6 and let's look at this as a starting point for our understanding...Romans chapter 6 and verse 5. Verse 4 ends with the statement, “That we now walk

in newness of life. We have been buried with Christ in a spiritual union into death. We have been raised with Christ in a spiritual union. And we now walk in newness of life.” Then verse 5 says, “For if we become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this...count on it...our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be killed, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.”

The old self has died. The old self is a corpse. We are no longer slaves to sin, “For he who has is free from sin.” If you are a slave and you die, your former master has no power over you, you're dead. Our former master, which is sin, is no longer the sovereign, no longer the dominant force. We have died to that.

Verse 11, “Consider yourselves to be dead to sin.” Strong language...strong language, “But alive to God in Christ Jesus.” Again, we understand that salvation is a death, that's the severest way to describe what happened. On the one hand it is a life, it is regeneration, it is birth. You are made alive in Christ, but it is also true that salvation brings about the death of the old man. Verse 14 says it yet another way, “Sin shall not be master over you.” That's what happened when you were saved. Sin is no longer a living, active, dominating master. Verse 17 says it yet another way. “Thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching, that body of doctrine to which you were committed and as a result, having been freed from sin you became slaves of righteousness.” You are alive, you have a new master, your new master is righteousness, not sin. Verse 22 says it another way. “Now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit resulting in sanctification and the outcome...eternal life.”

Now we talk a lot about the language of conversion being regeneration, new birth, new life. But we also have to talk about the language of conversion involving a death. It is the death of the old man. It is the death of the old man, the old self, the old man is dead...is dead.

Is Paul saying we are sinless? Is Paul saying we can be sinless? No there are some who think he is...saying just that. There are those people among us and they've been around a long, long time, who think that when Paul talks about new life and no longer being a slave to sin, what he means is that we are literally free to choose not to sin. One contemporary source puts it this way, quote, “No limit can be put on the degree of perfection attainable in this life. Doing so would be to limit the grace of God. Clearly the only limitation as to how holy you can be is that which you impose by your own free will.”

So you make the difference as to whether or not you are sinless by an exercise of your own free will. You are free to be sinless if you so choose. Your only limitation is your own free will.

Is that what Paul is saying...that the old man is so dead and so absent and so gone that in this new life sin is nothing but an option? Now lest you think that that's some isolated view, I'm sure you're familiar with a denomination called The Church of the Nazarene...Nazarene churches, been around for a long time, many wonderful people are a part of the Nazarene churches. Let me read you one of the Articles of Faith from that denomination. This is their own confession in their own words.

Under the title “Entire Sanctification,” this is what the Articles of Faith of the Church of the Nazarene says. “We believe that entire sanctification is that act of God subsequent to regeneration by which believers are made free from original sin or depravity and brought into a state of entire devotion to God and the wholly/holy(??) obedience of love made perfect.”

Let me back up and tell you what they're saying. They're saying that when you become a believer you now have the potential not to sin. And by an act of God, subsequent to your justification, to your regeneration, sometime after, you can be made free from original sin, free from depravity, be brought into a state of entire devotion to God, wholly obedience and love made perfect. In other words, you can become sinless.

This statement in their Articles of Faith goes on to say this, "This entire sanctification is wrought by the baptism with the Holy Spirit and comprehends in one experience the cleansing of the heart from sin and the abiding indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit empowering the believer for life and service." What they're saying there is this, it is not a progressive detaching from sin, it is a single experience. Some time subsequent to your salvation, you can have a spiritual experience that frees you from depravity and original sin, brings you into wholly obedience and perfect love.

The next article says, "Entire sanctification is wrought instantaneously by faith, preceded by entire consecration." In other words, you bring yourself to a point of entire consecration and God then by His Holy Spirit bring you entire sanctification...sanctification needs to be separated, sanctification is the idea of being separated from sin. God will separate you completely from sin and depravity if you are entirely consecrated to Him. That's an act of your will that can be exercised in an instant and you can then receive this entire sanctification. This experience, they go on to write, is known by various terms representing its different phases, such as Christian perfection, perfect love, heart purity, the baptism with the Holy Spirit, the fullness of blessing, and Christian holiness. It is called entire sanctification. The term that is often used to describe this is Eradication...the sin nature is eradicated.

The next article says, "We believe that there is a marked distinction between a pure heart and a mature character. The former is obtained in an instant, the result of entire sanctification. The latter is the result of growth in grace. Now those are the articles out of the Church of the Nazarene under the title, "Entire Sanctification."

Here's the idea. When you are regenerated, you receive new life. Sin is still a problem but by exercising your free will in a single act of faith, subsequent to your conversion, you can catapult yourself by the aid of the Holy Spirit into another dimension of spiritual existence in which you no longer are depraved, no longer held by original sin, but attained to wholly obedience and perfect love, entire sanctification and the eradication of the sin nature.

Now remember, the people who teach that doctrine are among those who are classified as Armenian in theology which means that you are saved by an act of your own free will as well. You come to Christ on your own by an act of your own free will. You will yourself to embrace the gospel. You will yourself to believe. And you believe. They also teach that having willed yourself to believe, you can lose your salvation. And the same would be true of entire sanctification, subsequent to your salvation you reach a point of entire consecration by acts of your own will, devout yourself fully to Christ, you are then entirely sanctified but you can lose that also. You can lose that also.

Now this is not, by the way, limited only to people who,...or in the Nazarene Church, this is the theology of all of classic Methodism and every group with any association to Wesley...this is the Salvation Army, this is Pentecostalism, this is the Charismatic Movement as well.

A little more history on it, however. Martin Luther confronted this kind of theology. He confronted it and he basically said it was a false philosophy that originated with Aristotle and had been imbibed by Medieval scholastics who were teaching that in an instant, in a moment you can be catapulted into another spiritual level in which sin no longer is an issue. Luther said this, "They teach that sin is entirely destroyed by Baptism, or some act of repentance and so regard it as absurd that the Apostle Paul confesses sin dwells in me." And Paul said that repeatedly in Romans 7. "These Medieval scholastics...says Luther...deny that because they say that sin is entirely destroyed by Baptism and repentance." Luther says, "As a converted or spiritual man, they say he can no longer have any sin in him. Therefore they argue he is an unconverted man if sin is still in him."

Well this is not new. Luther was battling this. One of the great scholars in America, years back, B.B. Warfield, twentieth century, in his great work, Perfectionism, traced this idea that you can become perfect as a Christian in this life back to John Wesley. And he says it was John Wesley who infected the modern Protestant world with this idea of some instantaneous experience that can bring you to entire sanctification. Warfield says, "This was not some kind of ancillary, some kind of fringe element in Wesleyan theology." Says Warfield, quote: "There was no element of his teaching which afforded him greater satisfaction than this one. There is no element of it which is more lauded by his followers. This is the core of Wesleyan theology and permeates historical classical Methodism in all of those groups that adhere to Wesleyan teaching. This launched the Holiness Movement, wave after wave after wave of the Holiness Movement since Wesley has washed over the church. It has various features but it has one consistent fundamental and it is this, the central core of this notion is that justification occurs at one point, and sanctification is separated from justification and occurs at another point. Both come as a result of the free will of the person. The first one brings about regeneration, the second one brings about entire sanctification."

"This view further can be explained in this manner. Sanctification is obtained like justification by a simple act of the will, by a simple act of faith. But not the same act as justification, a later act exercised specifically for sanctification." They also say, "Sanctification comes in this second act, and then again in a third and a fourth and a fifth and a hundred if necessary because it is gained and lost and gained and lost and gained and lost."

They further say, "Sanctification brings complete freedom from sins." What in the world do they mean by that? They mean sins that are premeditated, willful and conscious. And this constitutes a freedom from original sin and depravity if they are unpremeditated, unwillful and unconscious. Further, this view says, "Sanctification as such is not stable. It is momentary. It must be maintained by consecration or it will be lost." It's just like salvation to them. Salvation will be lost if it's not maintained, and sanctification will be lost if it's not maintained. Salvation can be instantaneously recovered and sanctification can be instantaneously recovered.

Now to make this work, you have to do two things. You have to redefine holiness and you have to redefine sin because...come one...who in the world are you kidding? Sinless perfection attained in a moment by an act of the free will? That only works if you redefine holiness and you say that holiness exists where there are still unconscious, unwillful, unpremeditated sins. Well that's a downgraded level of holiness.

And you have to redefine sin. Sin is only willful, premeditated conscious. So you redefine sin and you redefine holiness. Once you start redefining sin and redefining holiness...wow, there's no end to where you can go.

I grew up as a little kid sometimes looking at the back of the tableware we had at our house and seeing the name Oneida. Anybody see that? Some of you have Oneida tableware, flatware? Oneida...it's still around...big, big flatware company in America. You know where that came from? Oneida was one of 50 utopian communes that operated in New York in the wake of Charles Finney and his efforts there. Finney was an extreme Arminian. Finney advocated entire sanctification perfectionism, perfect holiness, eradication. And the Oneida community grew up in the wake of Finney. A lot of things grew up in the wake of Finney's horrendous twisting of the gospel. But there were about 50 utopian communes that operated in New York and Oneida started in 1849 and it went for 30 years till 1879 before they really began to understand what it was. It was founded by a man named Henry Noyas(?) who was a follower of Charles Finney, who believed that you could reach sinless perfection and live in a state of holiness free from sin.

So he got 300 people together and in order to kind of sustain their commune, they made flatware tableware. They lived in a large stoned mansion and they launched the company that still exists. What few people knew until it was finally discovered in 1879 which really brought down the commune was that this perfectionist entire sanctified, sinless commune practiced communal marriage so that every woman belonged to every man and every man belonged to every woman. And children, as soon as they reached the age of puberty were injected into this orgy. That was Christian perfectionism at a very strange level. Noyas simply adapted moral standards to his own preferences so they could live in a perpetual orgy and still claim to be entirely sanctified.

Now I know that's bizarre and I know that's extreme. But the point that I want to make is, I don't care at what level you're going to live, you've got to come to a redefinition of sin and a redefinition of holiness and then there's no limit as to how far you can go. Admittedly, that's a bizarre illustration of perfectionism, but in every case, the advocates of this view do the same thing.

There was a seventeen-year-old young man who was having a conversation with a friend of mine. In fact, this was told to me just this week. And this young man said to my friend, "I have reached entire sanctification," seventeen years old. He had bounced into that plateau by a momentary experience which they call the second blessing, or the baptism of the Spirit. To which my friend took him to Romans 7 and said, Paul says, "Sin dwells in me...sin dwells in me. Sin dwells in me. You mean to tell me you have attained to a higher state of purity than the Apostle Paul?" To which the seventeen-year-old said, "Apparently so."

So you're forced to downgrade the definition of sin, downgrade the definition of holiness to accommodate whatever it is that you want to define as perfection. And sin is only that which is premeditated conscious and intentional, or anything else you want to throw into that bag.

They do talk about mistakes, inadvertent thing. They do talk about temptations. But this is really a terrible way to live...under this illusion, downgrading holiness, downgrading the definition of sin. And beyond that, you come face-to-face with clear and abundant evidence that sin resides in you and troubles you. So even when you've downgraded holiness and even when you've downgraded sin, all you do is torture your conscience because your conscience knows better. And so you start to play spiritual games that eat away at your sense of right and wrong.

You say, "Why you telling us all of this?" This is historic stuff, it permeates our experience because most of you who have been around a while, including me, grew up in systems that had modifications

on this bad theology. I grew up in a somewhat traditional Baptist Movement. This Baptist Movement that I grew up in, along with every other Baptist Movement that I know about, and a lot of Bible church movements as well, was strongly influenced by Finney revivalism. It was strongly influenced by those who adhered to Christian perfectionism and to the idea that sanctification was not a lifelong process of slow steps day in and day out, but it was some kind of an experience, some kind of an epiphany that happened in a moment that catapulted you to another level. I grew up in that. I grew up hearing at the end of almost every sermon I heard, when I went to camp or when I went to a conference, or when I went to revival, "Please come forward for salvation, or come forward...see if this sounds familiar...for rededication, consecration, reconsecration."

I can't tell you how many times I was told that I needed to come to rededicate my life. I needed to come to take a huge step with God by an act of my will in faith, consecrating myself upon which God would pull me up to another level. Speakers at camp, I remember as a kid, would plead with us to rededicate and rededicate...and I used to always ask myself...what does that mean? And they would say, "Well what you need to do is come up here and you need to..." they used to call it a faggot service. They don't call that anymore, that's completely different. But that's what they called it, a faggot was a little stick, and they would say, "Come up and take a stick and consecrate yourself to the Lord and throw your stick into the fire."

I remember I was at Forest Home one time, everybody was getting real emotional and they were trying to get us to respond to that emotional work up and come up there and throw our stick in the fire. This kid near me, he went up there and he took off his watch and he threw it in the fire and he said, "I'm going to consecrate my time to God." What? How you going to know what time it is, you just threw your watch in the fire?

This is really true. This happened when we were having services over in the family center in the gym. One night after I preached, and I didn't ask about this, there was a lady there, now she wasn't the brightest star in the constellation, I'll admit that. But at the end of the service, she came down the middle aisle with a dog on a leash. She came up to the front, talked to the counselor. Later the counselor said to me, "She had come forward because her dog had rededicated his life." Obviously that's really weird. I don't think the dog was saved in the first place, so what... These are just words, concepts and ideas that some of us grew up with. I don't think I ever went to camp without being told to rededicate my life.

And when camp was all over, we would always hear this thing about you've been to the mountain top, you've consecrated, you've dedicated, now don't go down and lose this thing. But as far as I can tell, everybody did. By the way, this is all very, very big stuff in no lordship theology, which I've tried to battle all my life. I remember I was speaking at Moody Bible Institute one time for a week-long conference many years ago. And I had the morning session during Founders Week and it was every day at nine o'clock and another speaker had the eleven o'clock session. And in the nine o'clock session I was doing a five-day series on necessity for spiritual growth and sanctification as a day-to-day experience of growing in grace in the knowledge of Christ and yielding a little bit every day to the work of the Spirit through the Word. And growing into Christ's likeness, 2 Corinthians 3:18, being changed into His image from one level of glory to the next by looking at the glory of the Lord and letting the Spirit do His work.

And right after me at eleven o'clock came a guy who was a no-lordship person who believed in justification apart from sanctification...Jesus as Savior and sometime later you can make Him Lord.

That's the same theology in another package. And I'll never forget hearing him say, "You don't even need to worry about that until you're 30...35, you're young, enjoy your justification, worry about that when you get a lot older." It's a very, very popular idea.

I heard this many, many times growing up. "Receive Jesus as Savior. Some of you have received Him as Savior, but you need to make Him Lord." Did you ever hear that? You need to make Him Lord. It used to bother me. How could I make Him Lord? I'm not in charge of who's Lord.

It was J.C. Ryle in his marvelous epic book written in 1879 by the title of Holiness who said, "Sudden instantaneous leaps from conversion to consecration I fail to see anywhere in the Bible." And the reason J.C. Ryle didn't see them is because they're not there. That was an utterly unbiblical concept. He knew what all accurate theologians know, that justification and sanctification are inseparable. They both come at the instant of salvation. Justification is immediate and sanctification is progressive, but they cannot be separated. And sanctification is not some experience subsequent to salvation. It's a serious and consequential error to say that a Christian can be made perfect in this life, it's a monumental error with massive implications. And it's very unscriptural. Listen to 1 Corinthians 1:30, "By His doing by sovereign grace, sovereign power, not by your own acts of free will, by His doing you are in Christ Jesus who became, past tense, at your conversion wisdom from God and righteousness and sanctification." Package deal. Or chapter 6 of 1 Corinthians and verse 11, "Such were some of you. You are washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God." Sanctification and justification are connected and inseparable. Sanctification begins when justification is finished.

Perhaps delineating the two will help you a little bit. So here's some similarities between justification and sanctification. Both originate and stem from the free sovereign grace of God. It is only because of His grace that we are justified and sanctified.

Secondly, similarities, both are part of Christ's redemptive work of salvation. Thirdly, both are present in the same persons. Any person who is justified is also being sanctified. Any person who is being sanctified has already been justified. This is not a subsequent thing. This is not a second work and a third work. There is no such thing as a second blessing, some kind of catapulting into some other level of spiritual life subsequent to salvation.

Again, similarities. Both begin simultaneously. The moment of justification is the moment that sanctification begins. Number five, both are necessary to glorification. Those who reach heaven have not only been justified, they have also been being sanctified.

There are some differences as well as similarities. Let me give you some of those.

In justification, the sinner is counted righteous because the righteousness of Christ is imputed to his behalf. In sanctification, the sinner is actually made internally righteous though to a limited degree through the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, the righteousness of justification is not our own, it is Christ's given to us. The righteousness of sanctification is our own. Though mixed with our failings and imperfections, it is wrought in us through the Holy Spirit.

Number three, our works play no part in justification which is based only on faith. Our works, however, play an important part in sanctification for God commands us by the power of the Spirit to work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

Number four, justification is an instantaneous and finished work, totally complete the moment the sinner truly believes. Sanctification is an imperfect work lasting for the rest of our lives, never completed until glorification.

And finally, justification does not increase, does not develop, does not grow. The sinner is as justified at the moment of conversion as he will be when he steps his first foot into heaven. But justification is different than sanctification. Sanctification is a process that begins and progresses as believers grow in their spiritual walk throughout their Christian lives, ever increasing.

And I'll tell you one thing, sanctification is not evident when you say you're sinless. If you tell me you have reached eradication, you have reached the state of purification, you have reached the state of Christian perfection, Christian holiness, entire sanctification....my friend, you are far from being sanctified. Thomas Watson, the great Puritan wrote this, "Saving faith lives in a broken heart. It always grows in a heart humbled by sin in a weeping eye and a tearful conscience."

In other words, the more sanctified you are, the more you recognize your righteousness? No, your sin. Young people have asked me through the years, they still ask me at the Master's College from time to time, "Will I ever get victory over my sin? You've been around a long time, will I ever gain victory over my sin? Will I ever triumph? Is it always going to be this difficult? Is the battle always going to be this fierce?"

My answer to them is...sure. As you grow in grace and the knowledge of Christ, as you're more and more by the power of the Spirit of God conformed to the image of Christ because you're gazing at His glory in the Word, as you grow, sin will decrease and will decrease and will decrease, you'll sin less. However, here's the bad news...you'll feel worse. You'll sin less and feel worse because as you sin less and as you grow in grace, your hatred of sin increases because hatred of sin is an element of holiness.

So, the good news is, you'll sin less. The bad news is, you'll feel worse. That's why you can say with the Apostle Paul, "O wretched man that I am, for I'm the chief of sinners," and be the most mature Christian. It is not spiritual to say you've reached entire sanctification. It was John Owen who said, "Indwelling sin always abides while we are in this life." And it's worse than just having a filthy stinking shroud, it's a dead body, the corruption of which grows into our new life.

Well, that's the introduction. Let's find out what Scripture says. Proverbs 20 verse 9, "Who can say I have cleansed my heart? Who can say I am pure from sin?" A rhetorical question expects an answer. "No one." Or 1 John 1:8 to 10, "If we say we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves." That's why it's a torture to your conscience to live with that ridiculous illusion. If we say we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. We make God a liar because while we're saying we have no sin, He is saying, "Yes you do." James 3:2 says, "We all stumble in many ways." Galatians 5:17, Paul says, "For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh," that new man against the dead corpse, remaining sin, still attached. They are in opposition to one another, he writes, so that you may not do the things you wish.

Now that sends us to Romans 7, so let's look at Romans 7. Romans 7 is the definitive text on the struggle between righteousness and sin in the believer, definitive passage, Romans 7, verse 14. "We know...writes Paul...the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin." That's a strange statement for him to make because in the chapter prior we just read, chapter 6, he says, "I'm no longer the slave of sin, sin's mastery has been broken, sin no longer has dominion over me." That's true, but it is still true that while it is not the sovereign, while it is not the master, it is still there and bound to me...bound to me.

How do I know that? Verse 15, "For that which I'm doing, I don't understand. I'm not practicing what I'd like to do. I'm doing the very thing I hate. If I do the very thing I do not wish to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that it is good. So now no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which indwells me." That is the most definitive statement in the verse, really important. Paul distances himself from the sin that is me. It is no longer I. It's not the new I. It's not the new man, the new self, the new nature. It's the remaining sin.

You have to understand this. Look, conversion is not what I thought it was for most of my life. I have an old nature, that's what I read, heard, I have an old nature, I got converted, I got saved, so I got a new nature. Now my old nature and my new nature exist side by side, both alive, both aggressive and whichever one I will to express will have dominating power. I used to hear illustrations about a black dog and a white dog and whichever one you say, "sic 'em" to wins, so that salvation becomes an act of addition. You are this, you get this and you've got a war between the old which is still alive and the new.

That's not what the Bible teaches. The old is not alive, it is...what?...it's dead. You are a whole new creation...whole new creation. But that corpse...that's the way Paul wants you to understand it...is still attached and has a rotting influence. By definition, it is an entity that has no remaining vestige of life. The old man was not partially sinful. The old life was not mostly sinful. It was totally sinful. It had no righteousness and no potential for righteousness. It had to die. And at salvation, it did and the new man has come. "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation," 2 Corinthians 5:17. That new life created by God miraculous, listen to me, is sinless. That's right. That new life is sinless. It has to be, it was created by God. It is holy, righteous and eternal.

You want to know something very interesting? The greatest transformation in your life has already taken place if you're a Christian. It will be far greater than at your death. Your death will be a subtraction experience. You will just lose your unredeemed humanness. Your salvation was a transformation. You have already been created fit for heaven. And God did not do this miraculous work of regeneration, new birth, and creation, and have in it some components of sin because God can't create sin. Therefore Paul understands that the new I is not sinning, it is sin that is still there. This new life is pure and ready for heaven and has holy aspirations and holy longings and loves the Law of God. So this new life is the full expression of that life which will fit heaven.

So why do we go on sinning? Because we still possess the corpse. Paul says it again, verse 18, "I know that nothing good dwells in me," that is in my flesh. He puts it...he calls this old man, the remnants of this dead corpse, flesh. The wishing is present in me, the doing of good is not. The good that I wish, verse 19, I do not do, I practice the very evil I do not wish. Verse 20, "If I'm doing the very thing I do not wish, I'm no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me." Again he distances the new *ego*, the new I, the new man from that is there. It's like a holy seed in an unholy shell,

incarcerated and infected with the flesh. Or even a better illustration, the dead corpse is still attached to him.

Verse 21, he sums it up by finding the principle that evil is present in me...me, the one who wishes to do good. For I joyfully concur with the Law of God in the inner man, but I see a different principle, a different law in the sense of principle, in the members of my body. All through the fabric of my humanness. And it wages war against the law of my mind, making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members, wretched man that I am, who will set me free from the body of this death? It's dead, but it's a corpse, strapped to me.

Spurgeon said, "It is death incarnate, it is death concentrated, it is death dwelling in the very temple of life, such is the condition of the Christian."

It was custom in ancient days, ancient tyrants, when they wished to put men to the most dread punishments to tie the corpse of the victim they had killed to them, placing the two back-to-back. There was the living man and then tied to him was the dead body rotting, putrid, corrupting that he must carry about with him until it infected him with his own death and ate away his life. That's what Paul sees here, that ancient custom. He sees the corpse of what it was, still strapped to him, dead, loathsome, abominable, stinking carcass to a living man and it inhibits him from expressing all the wonder of newness.

You say, "Is this really a believer? Does this truly describe a believer?" Absolutely. I'll give you an illustration of this, you don't have to turn to it. You know Psalm 119, 176 verses, 175 verses in which David says he loves the Law of God, right? He loves the Law of God, he wants to know the Law of God, he delights in the Law of God. One hundred and seventy-five times he says that. Here's verse 176, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep."

What is that? After all of that, you've got 175 times he says he loves the Law of God. And at the end he says, "I'm in Romans 7." All this I know, all this is true, all this I embrace and affirm, but I am like a lost sheep. That's how it is. And we'll never be delivered until we're glorified.

So what do we do in the meantime? Turn to Romans 8, verse 13, the middle of the verse. "By the Spirit we are to putting to death the deeds of the body." I'm just going to grab that phrase out of there. We need to put to death, mortify is the old word, the deeds of the body. It's in a sense dead but it's acting, it's a corpse that is acting. I guess you call that a zombie, science fiction term.

So what do we do? We kill every expression of that corpse, put it to death. How do you do that? Oh, that's another study but you do that by applying the means of grace, abstaining from sin, avoiding temptation, making no provision for the flesh, fixing on Jesus, walking in the Spirit, meditating on Scripture, praying fervently, all the means of grace. It's a lifelong battle. But you've got to take it seriously. If you want victory, if you want growth and progress, don't wait for some epiphany experience, don't expect some second work of grace, don't expect to have some euphoric response to the teaching of the Bible that will catapult you to another level, it's a slow, steady climb and all the way you're gazing at the glory of Christ, being caught up in the wonder of who He is, walking in the Spirit, obeying Scripture and being changed into His image and killing the remaining sin every time it shows itself, using all the means of grace to do that.

And there's an Old Testament analogy that I used in the book *Vanishing Conscience* that I want to

use to close our discussion. Go to 1 Samuel chapter 15...1 Samuel chapter 15...because I think it's a memorable analogy. Again, this is not the intent of the passage but it works as a good analogy. It's pretty dramatic and unforgettable, like Lazarus.

“Samuel said to Saul,” verse 1, “the Lord sent me to anoint you as king over His people, over Israel. Now therefore, listen to the words of the Lord.” The Lord has put you in this position, now listen to what He tells you. “Thus says the Lord of hosts, I will punish Amalek, the Amalekites, for what he did to Israel, how he set himself against him on the way while he was coming up from Egypt. Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has and do not spare him but put to death both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.” That's a divinely dictated genocide. Wipe out the Amalekites. Deal with them ruthlessly. They were, by the way, vicious enemies of Israel, vicious enemies of God who had killed many Jews. Deuteronomy 25 tells about what they had done, they came after the Israelites not in a manly or courageous way, attacking the men, they waited for the women and the children who were in the rear of the Israelites and they came and slaughtered the women and children. And God had sworn to Moses with this, “I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven,” Exodus 17:14. Because of their viciousness, because of their wickedness, God called on Saul to fulfill that vow of destruction.

Saul went to Amalek, it says in verse 5, set an ambush. Go down to verse 7, “He defeated the Amalekites from Havilah as you go to Shur which is east of Egypt. And he captured Agag, the king of the Amalekites, alive.” That's a problem. He was told to kill them all. “Captured him alive, utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the ox and the fatlings, the lambs and all that was good, and were not willing to destroy them utterly, but everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed.” Very selective obedience. Partial obedience, motivated by covetousness and pride. He wanted to show off his prisoner, Agag.

Not only did they let Agag live, but obviously they let other Amalekites live. God was not happy. Verse 22, “Samuel comes and speaks to Saul for God. Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination and insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the Word of the Lord, He has also rejected you from being king.” God was angry. God dethroned Saul and his subsequent heirs, never again was there anyone from the family of Saul on the throne in Israel.

Verse 32 then, Samuel said, “Bring me Agag, the king of the Amalekites.” Now Samuel is a man of God. He's not a warrior, he's not a soldier. They brought him Agag. Agag came to him cheerfully. Sure he was alive. That's something to be cheerful about. And Agag said, “Surely the bitterness of death is past.” Or, can't we all just get along? Let bygones be bygones. Samuel said, “As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women.” And the Hebrew says, “And Samuel hacked Agag to pieces before the Lord at Gilgal.” Hacked him to pieces before the Lord.

Samuel obeyed. But even Samuel didn't get all the Amalekites. He didn't even get all the Agagites, descendants of Agag. Scripture tells us that just a few years later the reinvigorated Amalekites raided the southern region and took captive all the women and children, including some from the family of David. That's in 1 Samuel 30. David responded and went out, slaughtered more Amalekites but David didn't kill them all either. Five centuries later it is a descendant of Agag who has a plan to

exterminate the Jews, his name is Haman and his story is the book of Esther.

It was a big mistake by Saul not to get rid of all the Amalekites. They kept coming back and they came back invigorated, more angry than ever. I find this a memorable analogy to illustrate the sin that is within us. It needs to be ruthlessly hacked to pieces, or I promise you, it will revive and plunder our hearts again and again and again. And every time it comes back, it is likely going to come more fierce than before. It was John Owen who said, "Sin is not killed when it is only covered up. Sin is not killed when it is only internalized. Sin is not killed when it is only exchanged. Sin is not killed when it is only repressed. Sin is only killed when the conscience has been appeased and no longer accuses."

It's a lifelong effort. No short cuts, no second blessings, it's a lifelong effort, but with great promise. Philippians 1:6, "He who began a good work in you will...what?...perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." He'll perfect it.

Folks, we're all in the same process. There's no short cuts. There's no giant leaps. No calls for reconsecration, rededication and there's no perfection. It's a day in and day out willingness to hack sin to pieces using all the means of grace. One of the reasons we're here, as a church, it's really the primary reason, feeding you the Word of God, calling you to holiness, calling you to worship is to arm you with the means of grace to deal with sin. Can you imagine how awful it is to be a Christian in a church where the Word of God is not taught? Where the means of grace are not applied and lifted up and exalted? And the Agagites run amok in the life of believers. You do no favors in a church when you don't use the Word of God to arm your people, to strengthen your people with the necessary spiritual strength and the spiritual weapons they need to deal with the fierceness of the body of this death that is still there.

It's little wonder as you begin to understand this why heaven seems so wonderful. I look forward to not having to battle sin anywhere ever forever. That's the bliss of heaven. And it should be that heavenly longing here that sends us down the path to diminish the experience of sin as much as we can in this life.

Who shall deliver me from this body of death? Some day Paul says at the end of Romans 7, "The Lord Jesus Christ will, some day." Until then, we mortify the sin that remains and pursue the things that bring about holiness, virtue and the increasing sanctification.

Our Father, again this truth comes to us with such clarity and power from Your Word. We affirm it to be so because Your Word says it, but it strikes us with a note which in our own conscience and our own heart we can affirm. We know there are no short cuts. We know we are not perfect. We hear the cry of Your law against our own consciences, calling us ever to a greater holiness than we have ever experienced or known. We long to be what You want us to be. We long for the progression of our spiritual lives into increasing likeness to Christ. Certainly, for our own joy and for our own usefulness more than anything for Your own honor and glory. Do Your work in us day in and day out. Make us faithful to the means of grace, to worship, to fellowship, study Your Word, to pray, to live in Your presence at all times, to flee temptation, abstain from evil, pursue the things that are holy, just, pure, good that we might know the joy of obedience, usefulness and blessing. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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