

In Christ
Sanctification
May 22, 2022

Morning I'm Jake! If you're new with us this morning, welcome, we're glad you're here.

For our teaching these last few weeks we've been exploring this concept in the New Testament about what it means to be "in Christ" and all the spiritual blessings that happen for us when we follow after Jesus. Last week we talked about how through faith we are declared righteous before God apart from anything we could ever do - that, we don't work to earn our place before God - because through Jesus He has done the work for us.

Today is a continuation of that same concept, that gets into the trenches a bit more with it.

Suppose someone heard the teaching from last week, and lets call him "Jim." And Jim's heart was so moved last week - whoever taught that sermon, man, they just knocked it out the park. Jim came home last Sunday feeling more loved by Jesus and couldn't wait to come back to church next week.

But at the same time, Jim also notices something when he examines his life. He notices this proverbial "gap" in his faith where he knows from a theological level at least that he is fully loved by God and is declared righteous by God - but he notices that his life is a far cry away from this type of life that Jesus has called him to:

- He wakes up the next morning and realizes spending time with Jesus in Scripture and prayer is a constant struggle for his time and attention. He knows he should but the demands for the day just crowd his thoughts
- As he pulls up to work that day, he notices he still compares himself to others and judges people in his mind
- As he talks to his boss, he realizes that he will often will twist the truth just a bit to make himself look a little better in front of others
- As he goes home, exhausted and frustrated from a long day, he has this inner pull to shut down around his family and numb out to entertainment
- And as he goes to bed that night, he notices his thought life is going all over the place

Now Jim, as a Christian, is aware of all of this - and it feels as though the gap is wider and wider from this life Jesus has called him to and his actual every day life.

- And maybe you've experienced at some point in your Christian life what Jim has experienced. Where you notice the gaps in your walk with Jesus that no matter how aware of it you are, no matter how many times you've confessed to God and to your LifeGroup, no matter how many times you've set up plans to stop sinning in one specific way or another, you can't seem to see any victory from it.
- Or maybe you've experienced what author Pete Scazzero calls in the Christian life "the wall." "The Wall" is something, he says, every Christian will one day face - it's this point in your spiritual journey that you just feel stuck. Maybe that sin in your life feels ever-present, maybe you've grown apathetic, or maybe based on your season of life, you're are going through so much pain and suffering that God can often feel distant from you. Pete Scazzero goes onto say that as many as 85% of Christians never move past the Wall.
- Or maybe you've experienced what the 16th-century Spanish priest, St John of the Cross, calls the "dark night of the soul." Not to be confused with the Batman movies, the dark night of the soul is often typified as this long, long season of doubt and depression and disconnection from God. That no matter how many church services you attend or how often you read Scripture and pray, God feels noticeably absent in it all.

My question for us this morning: What do you do when we inevitably come to these moments in our walk with Jesus? Whatever you call it, whether its a spiritual gap, or a wall , or a dark night of the soul, what do you when your life doesn't seem to match up to the life God has called you to?

To answer that, we have to do some setup. So if you have a Bible, we're going to be in **Romans 7-8** this morning, I'd invite you to turn there.

And to give you some set up as you're turning there, last week we did a quick Bible study through **Romans 5-6**. The author Paul is helping this church understand what it means to follow Jesus. You have Greeks and Jews, each from their own unique backgrounds, and they're trying to figure out - what does it mean to be a Christian now? And often I've noticed, that people who really like Romans tend to like it for how theological it is. And no doubt, there's a lot of heady stuff in there. But at its heart, this letter is so pastoral. Paul, wants more than anything to see these Christians persevere to the end.

Romans 7:4

you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.

So Paul summarizes here what it means to be a Christian. Once you've placed your faith in Jesus, not by your own works, you are now justified or declared righteous - that when God sees you now He doesn't see your sin, He sees the righteousness of Jesus.

And now, he says in verse 4: because of that, we have been brought into the family of God. God is our father and we have spiritual brothers and sisters and now the journey begins to, as he says in **v.4**, bear fruit for God.

It's this idea that now that I am a Christian, my call is to serve not my passions or my desires but, through the power of the Spirit within me, my call is to serve King Jesus and what He desires for me. And when I do, I bear fruit in my life as a result. That the more I delight in Jesus and do what He's called me to, the more I notice my life will begin to shift to look more like Jesus.

I will begin to see more joy and more peace in my life. I will begin to see victory over sin. I will begin to obey the commands of the Bible, even if I don't want to, because I know Jesus' vision for my life is better than my own. My soul, over time, will expand more and more to be a person of love. This is what Paul means when he says "bear fruit"

To drive this concept further, I'll give you a pop quiz I often asked college students: how do you know whether an apple tree is an apple tree? Not a trick question. By it's fruit. (Sometimes college students would say "By its bark." Wut?) You know an apple tree is an apple tree because of the fruit it bears, likewise, how do you know a Christian is a Christian? By the fruit they bear.

Which for the record, I am a huge fan of that. We created a website with resources and all that because we're committed to helping you become more like Jesus.

----But...what happens when the rubber of our theology meets the road of everyday life and it's Wednesday and you're filled with so much frustration or you see the same sin getting in the way. What do you do then?

The Scriptures would say you're in good company, and that you're not alone. In fact, Paul experiences this too. Skip down to **v.18**:

Romans 7:18-20

For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. **19** For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. **20** Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

He's saying, even though I am a Christian, and I'm in Christ now - I still have this lingering sin within me, that pulls me in the direction of self-centeredness and bitterness and apathy. I know what I want to do, but there's this tendency to drift back.

Romans 7:21-23

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. **22** For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, **23** but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

In other words - prior to becoming a Christian, sin ruled and reigned within me. I was completely powerless to it. But now that I have power of the Spirit within me, my soul is now a spiritual battleground between two powers - the power of sin versus the power of Spirit.

And Paul who has seen his fair share of miraculous things, says "Hey some days, it feels like the power of sin is winning the battle." Paul, who planted churches, who performed miracles, and even saw the resurrected Jesus says, "Hey I'm in the same boat as you all. These gaps in my soul often feel like war."

He goes on:

Romans 7:24

Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

"I see this sin more and more in my life, I need help. Who will rescue me?!" And keep reading with me - in the Greek this is all the same sentence -

Romans 7:25 - Romans 8:1

25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. **1** There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Paul as he examines his life, he sees the gaps and the battles and the ever-constant struggles and he says, "I need rescue. Who's gonna rescue me? Because I don't think on my own!" And his answer within the same breath is Jesus. Jesus alone can save me. Jesus alone helps me persevere.

- Just as Jesus alone rescued me from the penalty of sin, so it's Jesus alone who is going to rescue me from the power of sin.
- Just as Jesus alone gifted me his righteousness, so it's Jesus alone who can help me experience his righteousness even when I'm in the trenches of everyday life

And believe it or not, the truth is Jesus is more committed to your spiritual growth than you will ever be. Jesus is more committed to your sanctification, to see you one day look just like Him, more than you can possibly imagine.

Here's how I would explain this. Let's say you have to take a really challenging math test. What we talked about last week, gift righteousness by faith, would mean that before I ever gave you that difficult test I wrote 100 at the top. It's already graded before you take it. You've been given a perfect score, a perfect record. So the pressure is off as you take the test. That's what imputed, or gift righteousness means.

What we are talking about today is that God is also committed to helping you learn how to do challenging math - like a teacher. He does not just give you the A and then say "Good luck." Rather he has a never-stopping commitment to work in and beside you to help the righteousness of Christ more and more invade your actual life and close that gap.

God gives us even more help than a math teacher though. He knows we need more than that to exhibit the kind of righteousness we were originally designed for. We need more than an instructor to grow into that.

If you keep reading in Romans 8, you find out what he gave us to see our righteousness come to fruition over time.

Romans 8:8-11

Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. **9** You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. **10** But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. **11** If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

At the moment of your conversion to Christ, you were given the Holy Spirit, the third member of the Trinity, to come and live inside you. God himself now dwells in you. So when you feel powerless against your struggles with sin, when you feel like there is no hope for you to overcome those things...well that would be true if you were fighting them alone.

But you are not fighting them alone. The same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead has now come to dwell in you, and if he could defeat death and hell he can handle your addiction, amen? He can handle your anger issues. He can handle your body image issues. He can handle anything that you have going on, no matter how overwhelming it may feel.

Again, Romans 8 is clear that we play a role in this, through setting our minds on the Spirit and not the flesh, through walking in the Spirit and not the flesh. We are not passive actors in this. But assuming your wholesale reliance on God's spirit through appropriate disciplines and practices, **to doubt your ability to grow or achieve freedom is to doubt the power of God himself.**

Paul goes on to say that part of our salvation is that we've been adopted into the family of God, and God's Spirit helps us start to act like God's kids:

Romans 8:14 -17

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. **15** For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" **16** The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, **17** and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

God is not just a tip-giver from the sky. He doesn't just give you a list of rules and say "good luck." He is not even just a very helpful math tutor. Instead, He comes to dwell inside you to ensure that the righteousness of Christ slowly but surely comes to fruition. He teaches you that you are now a son or daughter of God, and he helps you learn how to act like it. He has in mind your eventual glorification, where you walk in the glory of righteousness. That might not happen until the new heavens and the new earth, but it will definitely happen. He won't let it not happen.

This is what I mean when I say that **God is more committed to your righteousness than you are.**

Here's one that gets this across so beautifully, its one of my favorites:

Philippians 1:6

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

God drew you to Himself and saved you. You were not a mistake. He knew full well every sin you had and will ever commit, and He's committed to see it through. So when the New Testament speaks of sanctification, its not as though we are passive agents. We do our part, but all the while we obey and we strive and we fight knowing all the while knowing the true power and the true strength does not come from us but from the one who is working His power and His strength through us to make sure we make it to the very end.

Illustration

we do the State Fair every year. And this last year, we did those gondola rides that you sit in and me and Lucy have our three young kids. And at a certain point in the ride, we're like 50 feet in the air and we're being held but what feels like the dinkiest little bar. And my kids at a certain point see how high up in the air we are and they are holding me as tight as they can. But what they don't know is that all the while we are holding them so so much tighter. They have but the faintest clue of how much our strength is keeping them in there.

And so Christian, if you are in Christ, I don't know the spiritual "walls" that are in your life but rest assured that your Father in Heaven loves you more infinitely than you can possibly imagine. And He is holding on tight to you.

Please know that when you hold fast to Jesus, He is on the other side of things gripping you tightly into his arms

Application

And my hope for you this morning is to let **Romans 8:1** be a melody to your soul as you go throughout your week - there is no condemnation for those in Christ.

And you may say, "But this sin that's in my can't seem to go away no matter how hard I fight it,"

- My hope is that you would bear the fruit of obedience, through relying on the Holy Spirit and the promises of Scripture, that you might see victory over that sin
- But you may not, and you may have to bear the fruit of perseverance, through relying on the Holy Spirit and the promises of Scripture

But either way, we keep fighting because there is no condemnation for those in Christ and He will hold you fast.

And you may say, "But God feels distant in my life no matter how often I pray and fast and all that,"

- My honest to God hope is that the darkness would lift and you will be brought back into a season of experiencing delight in Jesus and bearing the fruit of joy
- But also, you may not, and you may have to bear the fruit of perseverance as you cling fast to the promises of Jesus and trust in the power of the Spirit even if you don't feel it

but don't throw in the towel because there is no condemnation for those in Christ and He will hold you much tighter than you can possibly imagine.

Conclusion

No matter what you are going through, I just want to give you something I hope will encourage you to wrap up our time

I have three kids, and one thing kids teach you is that time goes by very quickly. The days are long but the years are so short. Parenting is full of “lasts.” It feels like you just started, but today was your last day of Kindergarten! Our when your kids gets potty trained, and it’s like there’s a last time for changing their diaper! PTL. But before that, there was a last bottle. There was a last time we had to spoonfeed our children mashed up foods. There are so many of these events, and I can’t stop to think about them too long because I’ll just start crying and won’t be able to finish this sermon.

The thing is though, a lot of these last things happen and you don’t even know it. Like there will be a time where you look back and say, “that was the last time my daughter crawled into my lap to watch a movie. I didn’t know it at the time, but it was.”

“That was the last time my son wasn’t embarrassed to be seen with his dad. That was the last time she crawled, and now she’s all over the place. That was the last time we had an unscheduled family dinner before he left for college.”

Now I want you to think about the sin struggles that feel so discouraging. Think of yourself having to go to God, again. To your spouse, again. To your friend, again. To your LifeGroup, again. Tired of it, ashamed of it, frustrated by it.

What I want you to hear is that there will be a last time you will confess that sin. And you won’t know it when it happens. It will just feel like the next time, but then all of a sudden, months or years later, you will look back and say “Wow, that was the last time I had to confess that.”

So I’d encourage us to keep going. Keep turning to Christ, being receptive to the Spirit’s leading in you. There will be a last time, and you won’t know when it happens.

I’m not saying you will ever be perfect. With some things this freedom may not come until the banquet table in the new heavens and the new earth.

But what I am saying is that this is the trajectory God himself has laid out for you. He does not have in mind for you a life of constant defeat. He is the God who raises the dead. Who changes hearts and lives in an instant. What power do your sin struggles ultimately have over him? When your sin argues with God who do you think wins?

God is more committed to your righteousness than you are. He started the work and he is determined to bring it to completion.

The end of the story of Scripture is one of co-ruling and reigning with God over the new heavens and the new earth. There is the wedding feast of the lamb, where Christ the husband is betrothed to the bride, the church, after she’s been purified. We at that point are finally and fully glorified, utterly free of the last grasps of sin. Every trace of your most despairing sin struggle will be long forgotten—the last confession far behind you in the rearview mirror.

We may not be there yet, but we know that day is coming. Not because of anything we’ve done, but because of the righteousness of Christ we are clothed in, and the Spirit He gave us to help us learn to live in a place like that, free of all sin and rebellion. Because we have a God who was bound and determined to finish what he started. To sanctify us, and lead us to a place of eventual glorification where we get to be the kind of bright beings, collaborators and corulers with God, that we were designed to be from the very beginning.

Our hope of getting to that day, of getting to the last time you confess that sin, doesn't rest in your ability. Our hope rests in a God who has promised he will see it through.

So if you find in yourself any discouragement, any temptation to despair, I want to ask you to stop looking at your sin or at your frustration. Instead look to the eternal God who keeps his promises, who has said he will indeed finish what he started in you, and to the Spirit he's given you to bring such a glorious end to fruition.

That is where you will find robust and lasting hope in your war with sin. And you will look back on a certain thing and say, "That was the last time," and you will know that our God does exactly what He says.