

Psalm 51:1-6

- 1 *Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.*
- 2 *Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin!*
- 3 *For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.*
- 4 *Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you may be justified in your words
and blameless in your judgment.*
- 5 *Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
and in sin did my mother conceive me.*
- 6 *Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being,
and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.*

Introduction

Have you ever made plans to do something and it just never happened?

I don't mean like you planned to go to France for a month or something like that. I mean something like you planned to go visit someone, someone you care about who has a hard time getting out of the house now, and everything around you seemed to be ganging up on you to keep you from doing it.

Or maybe you have a bad habit that you're trying to quit. Something like smoking, or swearing, or whatever. It doesn't matter what it is. Ever notice that no matter how hard you try, even if you've been away from it for a long time (sometimes even years) that urge will come back. It will just sneak in from nowhere and jump right out in front of you.

I've talked to people who've quit smoking. Some of them haven't smoked in years. But they say that sometimes, depending on the situation, suddenly that urge to smoke comes back. They just can't avoid the urge.

Maybe you're like me and you really want to lose weight. I've got two problems when it comes to losing weight. First of all, I like eating. I do it without thinking! I will sit down with a bag of chips or something and say "I'm only going to eat a few." And then, I look in the bag and all that's left is crumbs.

My second problem when it comes to losing weight is I don't really like exercising. That caused some real problems for me back when I was in the military, let me tell you. I really hate running, unless there's something big and scary chasing me.

So, while I have the intention of losing weight, I have a hard time doing it because my bad habits keep getting in the way. I will do the two things that cause the most problems with my ability to lose weight; I'll sit on the couch and eat. Not helpful.

Our Christian life is like that, too. We all know how we're supposed to behave. We know we're supposed to read the Bible and learn from what we read, and apply it to our lives. But here's the truth of the matter: we're lazy, and we don't like to change.

Those are the two biggest problems we run into as Christians; laziness and inertia. You see, changing our lives actually takes work, and I don't know about you, but I'm really lazy and if I can get away with not working, I'll do it. Inertia is the resistance to change. We like things the way they are.

Let me give you an example of inertia. This isn't necessarily a bad thing in this instance, but it's a good example. On Saturday mornings, some of the men of the congregation get together for breakfast at the Augusta House of Pancakes. If we get a waitress that's served us a few times before, we really don't need to tell them what we want, except maybe to remind them a little bit. For the most part, we all order the same things every week. We're predictable, and in a way, we're resistant to change.

This week, as we continue our way through the book of Romans, we're looking at the last half of Romans chapter 7. This chapter is one of the most studied chapters in Romans, and probably the New Testament. And from what I've read, most of the commentators who write about this chapter don't really agree on what Paul is saying. Let's take a look at Romans, chapter 7, verses 13 through 25.

Romans 7:13-25

¹³ Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure. ¹⁴ For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. ¹⁵ For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the

very thing I hate. ¹⁶ Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. ¹⁷ So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. 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.

²¹ 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.

²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 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.

Flesh vs. Spirit

Several of the commentators I've read, writing about this part of Romans, disagree quite a bit about what Paul's really writing about here. Is he talking about his life before he became a Christian? Is he writing in the first person, but actually talking about a generic non-Christian or Gentile? Is he actually talking about someone he knows but not himself, but writing in the first person so that the person's identity is safe (the names have been changed to protect the innocent or guilty, as the case may be)?

The big thing I think that Paul is saying here in this section of Romans is that he is fighting a daily battle with sin. He's writing about himself, and his experiences with what it really means to be a Christian, to have freedom in Christ, and to be covered by God's grace and mercy.

I don't believe that Paul had an easy time living the Christian life that he writes about. He's held up as a hero to us, having been converted while he was planning to arrest Christians and bring them back to Jerusalem

for trial. I think Paul had daily struggles with his Christian walk, just like we do. Paul was a man, and he was human; he wasn't some perfect robot Christian that was always doing what was right with no problems at all. Maybe this is the "thorn in the flesh" that Paul writes about to the Christians in Corinth.

Paul obviously had problems in his life. Once he became a Christian, he was attacked by some Christians, because they didn't believe his conversion; he was attacked by the Jews, because he became a Christian; and he was attacked by the Gentiles, because he was trying to convince them to become Christians. But more than that, he was attacked by his own flesh. Like he says in Romans 7:15, "I don't understand what is happening to me: I don't always do what I really want to do. Instead, I am always doing what I actually hate."

Paul, writing to the Christians in the area of Galatia, gives a solution to the problem, but it's not something that's an easy thing to do, and it's also not something that's a perfect solution.

Galatians 5:16-19

¹⁶ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

Paul says keep trying to do what's right. We know what the right thing to do is, we just need to keep trying to do it. Eventually it will become easier. But, just like my friend that quit smoking, that urge will sometimes come back and jump out at you when you least expect it.

The night before Jesus was crucified, he was in the garden praying. Jesus would often go off alone to pray, and this time he took some of

his disciples with him, but then separated himself from them to pray alone, but asked them to watch with him through the night.

Matthew 26:40-42

⁴⁰ And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour?" ⁴¹ Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

I want the spirit to win

Like Jesus told his disciples, our spirit is willing, wanting to do what's right, but our flesh, is going to fight against the spiritual side of us.

Just because we know it's going to happen doesn't mean we shouldn't try. In fact, that's exactly the reason that we should try to do what's right; because sin, through our flesh, will try to keep us from doing what's right.

Paul writes about his struggle with sin through the flesh in his letter to the Christians in Philippi.

Philippians 3:12-16

¹² Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. ¹⁶ Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

Paul admits that he's not there; he's not perfect, but he's going to keep trying, keep straining forward toward that goal of living a sinless life, because Jesus died for him.

Sin is a bad thing, and is the biggest problem in our lives, but Paul says don't let it get you down. Yes, we're going to sin; that's just how it is. The point Paul's making here is that when we do sin we need to realize that it was the wrong thing to do, ask for forgiveness, and move on. Don't dwell on your problems, focus on the end goal; eternal life with God in heaven.

When I was going to Weight Watcher's meetings regularly (which I need to start doing again), the woman running the meetings I went to made an encouraging comment that I think applies to our Christian life just as much as anything else. She was telling someone in the meeting not to get down on themselves for gaining weight. It's going to happen. Then she added this: "When you get a flat tire on your car, you don't get out of the car and poke holes in the other three tires, right? You fix the one flat tire you have and keep going."

Sin is like that flat tire. Just because you sinned doesn't mean you should give up on working toward being a good Christian. Like the old song says, you've got to pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and start all over again.

[The spirit is light](#)

So, how do we keep going? How do we ever do anything that's good anyway? Since it seems that all we ever really do is sin?

Well, that's an exaggeration, of course, but how do we do good things? Through the spirit. The more we understand God's will, and the more we feed our spirit with good things, godly things, the more likely we are to be able to do what's right.

In John's first letter, he compares God and the Holy Spirit to light. Let's take a look at 1 John chapter 1, 5-10.

1 John 1:5-10

⁵ *This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸ If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.*

Verses eight through 10 are key to this whole thing, I think. John says that we need to be walking in God's light, which means following His will, studying His word so we know His will, and trying to do what's right. But John says, just like Paul has been saying, we're going to sin. If we say we don't sin, we're lying, which is a sin! But John says we need to confess our sins, and when we do, God will forgive us and take them away from us. That's grace and mercy right there.

Conclusion

We all sin. We all mess up. That's just how life goes. But Paul says in the end of Romans chapter 7 that we have a solution to our problem. Paul understands how badly messed up we all are. He says "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 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." Jesus is the solution to our problem.

What do we need to do? We need to believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God; that He lived a sinless life; that He died as a sacrifice for our sins. We need to accept His sacrifice for our sins, say that it was for us, and believe that it's true. We need to confess our sins, and turn away from them. Then we need to be immersed into His death, to wash away

our sins. After that, we need to keep trying to obey God, and encourage each other to keep doing what's good and what's right.

If you have done all that, fantastic. I'm happy to call you my brother or sister. If you haven't done that yet, talk to me about it.

2 Peter 1:3-11 (Closing)

³ His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, ⁴ by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. ⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, ⁶ and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, ⁷ and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. ⁸ For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. ¹⁰ Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. ¹¹ For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Matthew 9:14-24 (Bible Study 1)

¹⁴ And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and scribes arguing with them. ¹⁵ And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed and ran up to him and greeted him. ¹⁶ And he asked them, "What are you arguing about with them?" ¹⁷ And someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. ¹⁸ And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able." ¹⁹ And he answered them, "O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me." ²⁰ And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. ²¹ And Jesus asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. ²² And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." ²³ And Jesus said to him, " 'If you can'! All things are possible for one who believes." ²⁴ Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!"

2 Corinthians 12:1-10 (Bible Study 2)

¹ I must go on boasting. Though there is nothing to be gained by it, I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. ² I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. ³ And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— ⁴ and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. ⁵ On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses— ⁶ though if I should wish to boast, I would not be a fool, for I would be speaking the truth; but I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me. ⁷ So to

keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.⁹ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.¹⁰ For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

2 Timothy 2:1-7 (Bible Study 3)

¹ You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus,² and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.³ Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.⁴ No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.⁵ An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.⁶ It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops.⁷ Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.