

Overcoming Our Sins

by Rene P. Brown

Every Christian is beset by sins some time or other. Some have more, some much less, but all Christians struggle over some kind of sin from time to time. Some have a particular sin that is so a part of their lives, it causes feelings of total defeat simply because they cannot seem to overcome the sin. Others do not suffer such recurrence but have things from time to time that bother them and where victory is difficult. They hate the sin, but victory is always out of their grasp. The more they try to overcome it, the more they participate in the sin. The more determination they voice, the more defeat they experience.

This is the situation with many, many Christians. They hate the sin, and they hate themselves because they cannot overcome it. They know that believers (those born again in Christ) should not be participating in sins, but they cannot seem to help themselves. It seems that sin always wins, and the more they try and the more determined they are to overcome the sin, the more the sin invades their life.

What is the matter here? Part of the answer lies in Paul's letter to the Romans: (Rom 7:5 RSV) "While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death." (Rom 7:8 RSV) "But sin, finding opportunity in the commandment, wrought in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law sin lies dead.

Can this be possible? Can it be that the Law (rules, standards, etc.) are actually the cause of the problem rather than the solution? It seems so reasonable to assume that if we very carefully study what God wants us to do, and make lists as it were so we can remember all these things, this will help us to get the victory over sin! But obviously that approach is not working! Millions of Christians could tell us that it is not working. If we speak to any Christian, we will find that the harder a person tries to keep God's laws, the more they fail. And in fact the failure seems to be in proportion to how hard they try! Victory is always beyond the grasp.

(At this point I want to inject this thought: Down deep inside, in the heart of true believers, that is, those who are really in Christ, they hate sin. And when they sin, they hate it although they may find themselves going back to the same sin over and over. If this is not the case, that is, if someone cannot truly say that down deep they hate sin but rather they enjoy it without any feeling of hatred of it and without any conviction of the Holy Spirit about the sin - that person must seriously question whether he or she is truly born again. In other words, are they really in Christ or as some would say: Are they really saved? It is doubtful that someone is born again who enjoys sin without any conviction coming to them from the Holy Spirit. If they cannot truly say that down inside, they hate sin, they should seriously question if they truly belong to Jesus.) Trying to avoid sinning by keeping God's law may work for a while. As we concentrate on the law of what we know God demands of us, we may be able to do it for a while. But as soon as we relax or as soon as we go to deal with some other sin in our life, the sin comes back, perhaps stronger than ever. For example if you resolve to pray every day a certain amount, you may find you can do that for a while, but sooner or later, you will fail. Or as you add some other rule to keep, and concentrate on the new one, you may forget to pray as you promised! Millions of Christians all over the world experience the same results. And to the extent they may experience some kind of success, it seems their life just dries up and becomes more and more like a dry stick.

2Cor 3:6 (RSV) "who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not in a written code but in the Spirit; for the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life." Following a written code or trying to do something on a "must do" basis kills. It will never bring life. Where is the abundant life Jesus promised? Where is the ongoing joy we are to experience in Christ? You will never achieve it through keeping rules or laws.

First, we need to come to understand that the Law, any law (or rule or standard), will only stir up sin. Paul makes this very clear if we just read Romans Chapter 7 carefully. Refer to the verses quoted above and also to the following: Rom 7:15, 19 (RSV) "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate..... ¹⁹For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do."

It is true that Paul's life itself is not our standard but his words in scripture come to us from the Holy Spirit of God, and it is safe to look at his success in living the Christian life. If he had problems doing something a certain way, we will probably have the same kind of problems. That is, we will probably end up with the same result he did. And it is plain that Paul wrestled with sin and found that he could not defeat it by carefully working on the sin.

By the time we follow Paul's thoughts in Romans chapter 7 to the end, it seems hopeless. The man is not doing what he knows he should do, and he is doing what he knows he should not. That is exactly where thousands of serious Christians find themselves every day - and they hate being in that state of affairs. Many, many serious dedicated Christians who love Jesus and desire to serve Him feel defeated and do not enjoy the abundant life He promised.

Now we come to victory: Paul tells us in (Rom 8:1-2 RSV) "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ²For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death." This is wonderful news!! We are not condemned by God and therefore, we must not condemn ourselves. There is **no** condemnation even when we do sin. **None!** I repeat; **NONE!! No Condemnation!!** That is tremendous news!

And then Paul tells us why this is true: We are no longer under the old Law because the bible teaches that we are dead to the old law. Now Paul tells us that there is now a new law in effect called: The law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus. This new law has set me free from the law of sin and death. The new law has superseded the old one! This is tremendous good news!

Now that we know about this new law, what is it? What does it mean? I appreciate it; I believe it, I receive it - but what is it and how do I handle it or what do I do with it?

The simple answer is this: Christ has fulfilled the law for me. Secondly, when He died on the cross, my old sinful nature I received from Adam my forefather, died with Him. And when He arose from the grave, I rose with Him as a **new man**. This new man has the nature of Christ; the new man (me) has **divine life!** And the new man has a new heart and God has written His law of love on this new heart.

First, let's see that we did indeed die with Jesus and die to the law and die to sin. Let us look at some scriptures:

Rom 7:4 (RSV) "Likewise, my brethren, you 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."

Rom 7:6 (RSV) "But now **we are discharged from the law**, dead to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit."

Rom 6:2 (RSV) "By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?"

Rom 6:7-8 (RSV) "For he who has died is freed from sin. ⁸But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him."

2Cor 5:14 (RSV) "For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died."

Gal 2:19-20 (RSV) "For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. {20} I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and

the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

Col 2:20-21 (RSV) "If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit to regulations, ²¹"Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch""

Col 3:3 (RSV) "For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

From all these scriptures, it is quite plain that when Jesus died on the cross, somehow, some way, God caused me to die with Him. Now there is one thing sure about death: It will separate us! So it separates us from our old, sinful life. The old man, the one born after our forefather Adam with its tendency to sin, is dead and gone. That man is dead and buried with Christ!

Now it is also true that I arose with Jesus: (Eph 2:6 RSV) "and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus," I am now seated with Christ in heavenly places. How is this possible? It is possible because we are spirit beings though we have a soul and live in a body. Our spirits are perfectly capable of living with Jesus in heavenly places. In fact, the life in me comes from "imperishable seed". 1Pet 1:23 (RSV) "You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;"

Jesus now lives in me. I have received the very Spirit of God in my spirit so that the life of Jesus is now giving me life. John 14:6 (RSV) "Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me."

Now if indeed I have died to sin as the scriptures tell me, then it should no longer have control of me. Indeed this is true. This new man (me) does not have to sin! That is good news.

But you may say, "But that is my problem, I do sin". Now it is time to do what Jesus told us to do.

Mat 16:24-25 (RSV) "Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵For whoever would save his life [his soul life] will lose it, and whoever loses his life [his soul life] for my sake will find it."

What is Jesus trying to tell us? Simply this: We have to die to the old "self-life" we have been living since we were born. What is this "self-life"? Rom 7:18 (RSV) "For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it."

The flesh or self-life is nothing less than the way we have been getting our needs met - apart from God - all our lives. It does not depend on God; it depends entirely on our own strength to accomplish all we accomplish in life.

Paul could not have said it more plainly: There is nothing good dwelling in my flesh! And Jesus plainly tells us we need to deny this old self or soul life which does not include God at all and put it to the cross daily. Every day, we once again consciously decide that our "self" will not rule but rather we voluntarily choose to allow the Lord Jesus to live out His life through us. Very plainly, since we were born again, He has been living in us. His Spirit is fused with our spirit. We have received of His divine life. He has willingly chosen to indwell us. 1Cor 6:19-20 (RSV) "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; ²⁰you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."

How do we "glorify God in our body". Very simply we give up our life to Him and allow Him to begin to live out His life through us.

Rom 12:1 (RSV) "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."

Col 1:27 (RSV) "To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."

Yes, we begin to allow Jesus to live out His life through us. We lay down our lives to Him, give ourselves over to Him to do with as He pleases. That is what a sacrifice is. It is like the day Abraham was told to sacrifice his only son Isaac. Apparently Isaac willingly allowed his father to bind him and put him on the wood for the fire. There is no indication that Isaac tried to escape his father, and yet he must have figured out what was coming as he lay there bound and on top of the wood for the fire, and Abraham had the knife raised!

When Jesus begins to live out His life, we no longer operate on the basis of trying to stop our sinning by keeping rules and laws. We rather give up our lives to Jesus every day. We have become a **New Man** or **New Creation**

2Cor 5:17 (RSV) "Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is **a new creation**; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come."

The New Man has a new heart just as God promised in Ezek 36:26 (RSV) "A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."

Now this new heart along with our sanctified minds receives God's laws: Heb 8:10 (RSV) "This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

This is not something we work at; God does it all Himself. So through much tribulation and much failure, we learn one thing: **We cannot live the Christian life!** Everyone's history is the same. The more we struggle and try and the more rules we put on ourselves, the less successful we are.

On the other hand, as **we give ourselves over to Jesus** or "Let go and let God", **Jesus begins to live out His life through us.** Amazing! Jesus is the only one who ever lived a sin free life! Amazing! We always thought we could do it and we learn we cannot. But when we allow Jesus to take over and begin to live in God's grace, and when we set our focus on Jesus and not on ourselves or on sin, our lives begin to come into order. Victories begin to come. But even if we fail, we remember that wonderful scripture in Romans Chapter 8:

Rom 8:1-2 (RSV) "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ²For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death."

We quit wringing our hands and worrying and striving over sins. We are dead to sin. It has no hold over us. When sinful thoughts come at us, we know they are not ours, but they are from the devil. We, in Jesus' strength and believing He is working in us and through us, take every thought captive.

2Cor 10:5 (RSV) "We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,"

(Let me inject at this point: One of the ways Satan gains access to us is something Paul refers to in Romans Chapter 7 as "sin that dwells in us". This is a sort of "persona" of sin which Paul does not explain, but through our flesh and the work of Satan, it feeds us thoughts from Satan which are lies. We just need to understand that this "persona" is not us; it is not our thoughts and the source is the devil. So we can take those thoughts captive unto Christ just as scripture tells us. We do not need to follow ungodly thoughts that come to us as they are not from our "mind of Christ" but from the devil! A

teaching on this sin “persona” is beyond the scope of this teaching and is dealt with in other FMI teachings.)

Wow! We no longer strive over sin. We remember that in Christ we have total, complete forgiveness because He shed His blood that all our sins might be forgiven, even the current sins and the sins I may do tomorrow. We just rest in Him, knowing He will live out His life through us and that sin is not the issue anymore - the issue now is **relationship**. And indeed we have this wonderful relationship with the God of the universe, our Creator, through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. That is good news!

*******End of Lesson*******