

[\(Watch short video clip.\)](#)ⁱ Poor Lulu. She was in a difficult struggle with herself. Should she go to school like a good little girl or should she spend the day fishing? Lulu was engaged in the age old battle between her devilish side and her angelic side. You'll be happy to know that the cartoon ends with Lulu going to school, so the good guys won this round. If we replace the devil with our sinful nature--the flesh--is this about how the battle goes for us as well?

Last week we covered the first two points in this outline and now we start with the third point--a question: why does this happen?

1. God has changed my heart.
2. But I still sin every day.
3. Why does this happen?
- 4 .What can be done?
5. Jesus alone can deliver me.
6. I will fight and grow until I die.

Even after conversion, we all have a dual nature. The spirit of the living God resides within each believer. This is a staggering truth that we should never take for granted. Because of the work of the Holy Spirit, we have a regenerated heart. He removed our heart of stone and replaced it with a heart of flesh. In Colossians Paul calls us a "new creation." Several places in the New Testament this new creation is called the "inner man." In this chapter Paul refers to our converted self as "my inner being." This is the part of us that wants to do right. As the first point in the above outline states, God has changed our heart. We are completely different than we were prior to conversion. This part is spiritual and walks in the ways of the Spirit. The inner being hates the evil and clings to the good. To the degree that we follow the inner being, we will avoid evil and sin.

But we also have another nature within us which leads us to sin every day. Some people may not like that statement--we sin every day. You may be thinking to yourself, "Well I may not be perfect, but I think there are some days where I avoid sin altogether." In previous weeks I think we have already established that we will never arrive at a state of sinless perfection, but isn't it possible to have days now and then where we can lay our head down on the pillow at night and

realize that we did not sin on the day? Is such a thing ever possible? I don't want to argue if you think that it is possible, but I know when I consider not just my actions, but my thoughts, motives and desires, I never go a single day without sinning. I am quite sure I sin much more than I even realize.

But the other nature within us, unlike what little Lulu had to battle, is not the devil. We don't have little devils sitting on our shoulders poking us to do evil. Now I am not saying that the devil does not influence us, only that he does not dwell within us. He is an outside force. In fact we have three separate forces which work against us at all times--the world, the flesh and the devil. There is no single Bible verse that contains this phrase but it is a principle based on many passages and truths. Dave Hart from Living Waters calls this the Axis of Evil. **MORE** This is why we must never underestimate the corruptive and destructive power of sin. The world pulls at us because the devil owns the world. He is the prince of the power of the air. The devil is not sovereign but the Sovereign God has allowed him temporary rule over the world. The devil uses every possible temptation and evil influence to carry us away. The world and the devil are two sides of this axis of evil.

But if you added the power of the devil and the world together, the battle of the flesh probably gets more print in Paul's letters. He addresses the influence and harm of Satan and he clearly warns about the pull of the world upon us, but Paul spends more time talking about the flesh than he does the other two parts of the axis of evil. But what is the flesh? What is this that drives us to do the evil we don't want to do and not do the good we want to do? Let's look more closely at how Paul described the flesh.

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.

I find a little humor in verse 17 because it sounds like Paul is playing the old blame game. *So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.* he said nearly the identical thing in verse 20. *Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.* It's like the red-faced mom who walks into the room after she heard a loud crash and glass breaking. What's the first thing mom says? "Alright. Who did it?" Let's say there are four kids in the room--what do they say? "It wasn't me." You know, know that technology is getting cheaper all of the time, maybe parents of young children should put video cameras all over the house. That way when 100% of the children say, "It wasn't me," mom can rewind and find the guilty culprit.

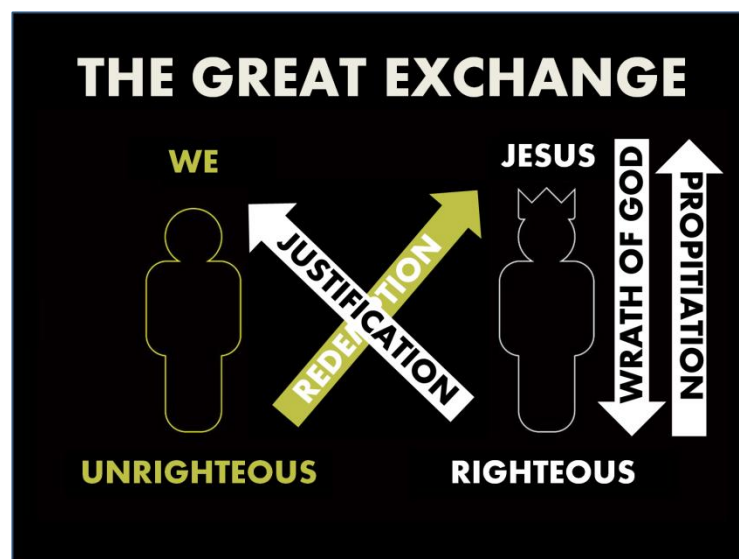
But it really does sound like Paul is passing the buck, doesn't it? "I didn't do this. Sin did it. It's not my fault." It almost sounds like passing the buck, but not quite. The "sin" inside of Paul is the flesh. Immediately after the comment about sin causing him to sin, he wrote *For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.* The entity which makes Paul--and you and I--choose to sin is the part of us called the flesh. If you are using a NIV it is translated as "sinful nature." The flesh is what remains of our former self.

Now here's a key question--is the flesh "us" or not? In verse 17 Paul said that he wasn't the one sinning but it was sin, or the flesh, within him. That sounds like Paul's flesh is not the real Paul, right? But verse 18 sounds like it is Paul. *For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.* Furthermore, look at verse 21 and following. *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.* There's the "inner being." Paul's inner being delighted in the law. This was the converted part of Paul the apostle. But his inner being was at war with his flesh. This is why even though the devil is always prowling around looking for someone to devour, the flesh is with us 100% of the time and if the war is not constantly raging, it is like a cold war--both sides are resting and waiting for the next big battle.

So is the flesh us or not? I think this is the right distinction--and now we will apply it to ourselves. The flesh dwells within us. It is part of us but it is not us. How did Paul address his readers at the beginning of this letter? he called them "saints." Whenever Paul wrote a letter to a church, he always referred to them as saints. My first job as a medical technologist was in a catholic hospital that, at the time, was still run by nuns. Catholic nuns held all of the higher positions of leadership. During our orientation, one nun was telling us the history of the hospital and of the nun who made it happen. She was obviously an extremely capable and driven person as she received many accolades within the church for her good work. The nun finished the history lesson by telling us that they were still waiting on a verified miracle associated with this nun so that she could be deemed a saint. So in the Catholic Church, you not only need a long life filled with an abundant supply of good works, you also need to have something miraculously happen.

This is not what the New Testament calls a saint. Every believer is a saint because it simply means to be "set apart." It literally means--are you ready for this? "Holy ones." Wives, sometime today I want you to call your husband a saint. Just simply say, "Honey, you're a real saint." We usually reserve such compliments for when another person does something quite extraordinary for us. But unlike the way we use the term or unlike the way the Catholic Church uses the term, sainthood cannot be earned. Being a saint is the fruit of being justified by the blood of Christ.

You should all remember the Great Exchange. Our unrighteousness was counted to Christ, which is redemption. As a result, the wrath of God was poured out on the Son which satisfied his wrath, which is called propitiation. Finally, the righteousness of Christ was counted to us, which is called justification. Justification declares you holy. Justification declares you to be a saint. You see, sainthood, if we can call it that, cannot be earned, because it



is part and parcel of your salvation.

Let's go back to Luther's statement we looked at last week. Luther famously wrote that we are *simul iustus et peccator*: simultaneously justified and a sinner. Now looking at the Great Exchange, do you think Luther meant that we are simultaneously righteous and unrighteous? That would not be possible, would it. We are no longer unrighteous. We are counted as righteous. But the problem is that many Christians see themselves as half saint and half sinner, like some kind of grotesque chimera. This is wrong and not at all what Luther meant. Our fundamental identity is that of a saint. We are a new creation. We are in Christ. We are sealed by the Holy Spirit. We are holy one, set apart for the Master's use. If you see yourself as half good and half evil, you can't help but act in that way. If you see yourself as worthless, you will feel worthless and if you see yourself as half evil, you are more likely to do evil.

But what of the flesh? If it's not the real us, then what is it? I liken the flesh to cancer. Cancer and the flesh both dwell within a person. Both cancer and the flesh are very much a part of the person, but if your body has cancer, it does not make you cancer. Just like cancer, your flesh is the part of you that wants to do evil and harm you and others. It's not you, but you are still responsible for it. Paul did not lay blame on the flesh as if he was absolving himself of all responsibility. Do you see why it is so important not to see yourself fundamentally as a sinner? Now even Paul called himself the "chief of sinners" but I am convinced that he did not see himself chiefly as a sinner. he was admitting that he was not even close to being done with his fight against sin. It was an argument for lesser to greater. If the apostle Paul still sins that much, if his battle is real and daily, how much more do we still have a battle with sin.

The other thing to note from this passage is the deceptiveness of sin in verse 11. *For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.* Like Satan, the father of lies, our flesh is a great deceiver. Again, Satan works to deceive us at every turn but this is why we can't blame all of our problems on Satan. The flesh within us is a constant deceiver. In fact, I think we could trace most of our sins back to some form or lie.

Sin can deceive using the law by telling us that we will never measure up to the law, that we will never be good enough; that I will never be as righteous as the guy or gal next to me, so why even try. I am a miserable sinner, so why not just give up and give into sin?

On the flip side, sin can deceive by telling us that we *can* obey the law; that we can be a good person, that we can measure up. We set about to create a list of rules that may or may not be in the Bible so we can convince ourselves that we are good people. This is the foundation of legalism. If I don't smoke or chew or run with girls who do, then I am a righteous person. If I don't watch movies or play cards or wear short skirts, then I am a good person. Legalism is a creation of the flesh. It is created by the flesh and receives ongoing nourishment from the flesh. legalism is pure flesh but it deceives you into thinking that it comes from the Holy Spirit. This might be a more powerful deception than the person who feels like a miserable sinner because the deception keeps you from seeking a cure. To use the cancer illustration again, it's like you have cancer but you have convinced yourself that you are cancer free and healthier than most everyone else.

Now to our fourth point.

4 .What can be done?

Verse 18 reads, *For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.* The inner being wants to do right but the battle with the flesh keeps me from doing the good. We need to take this line very seriously--we do not have the ability to carry to obey the Lord. We can't do the good and avoid the evil. Even though we are saints and new creations, we still do not have the ability, the power to do what is right.

This point can be confusing for some because even unbelievers seem to do good all of the time. What do you call it when a young mother who happens to be a Muslim, sacrificially loves her children every day? What do you call it when an unbeliever is able to kick a 20 year drug habit and turn his life around? How can you say that they don't have the ability to carry out something good? Well what complicates this even more is that Paul said that even he did not have the ability to carry out the good.

We have to distinguish between what in some ways what could be called a "good" action. Certainly loving your children is good. Kicking a drug habit is good. Yet, even as a believer with the Holy Spirit dwelling within him, the apostle Paul declared that he did not have the ability to carry it out. He couldn't do it! That's the power of the flesh. The flesh takes a good thing and taints it.

It is good to be aware of our inability to do good and avoid evil for two reasons. One, it forces us to be utterly dependent upon the Holy Spirit for every good work. I'll talk about that more in a few minutes. But the other reason why we need to be painfully aware of our inability to do good is because we are so prone to practice sin management. You know what that is, don't you? Christianity has a lot of rules, and that's good. We need to have boundaries on our behavior and a moral compass to point us in the right direction. But sin management is the practice of taking these rules and forcing us to behave in certain ways. It's behavioralism without any heart change. We manage our sin and we try to control it so it gives the impression that we're doing the right thing.

The evangelical church is really good at this. We take all of the greatest Bible stories, strip them of the gospel and pull out the good behaviors. Be brave and courageous like David when he faced the giant. Don't be angry and malicious like Samson. Be faithful and productive like Noah. Obviously I am exaggerating here but the temptation is to learn how to better control your behavior without actually being transformed. That's sin management.

Last year we held a parenting class, part of which was taught by Paul David Tripp. The [video clip](#) I want to show you is about five minutes long but it perfectly illustrates sin management.

So beware of nailing apples to a dead apple tree. The apostle Paul was not interested in nailing apples to a dead apple tree and neither should we. So in answer to the question, What can be done, we must not think merely in terms of good behavior. You can teach a monkey to act nicely but the primate will never understand right and wrong. Some of our sin management is as useful as a circus monkey. It looks good on the outside but deep down it is just rote behavior modification. So there are actually two answer to this question, what can be done.

Nothing. Did Paul have the ability to do good/ Then we don't either. There is nothing we can do because...

5. Jesus alone can deliver me--

In concluding his thoughts, Paul cried out, *wretched man, who will deliver me?* You see, the first answer is not a what, but a who. Jesus. Also, don't think of the wretched as sinful. This is not John Newton's wretch from Amazing Grace.

Amazing Grace How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me.

John Newton was a wretch. As a slave trader and all around dirt bag, Newton sinned boldly. So he could rightly refer to himself as a wretch in his unconverted state. But the word wretch here does not mean sinner but rather one who is afflicted. And Paul was afflicted. *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.* You and I are also wretched in the same way that Paul was wretched. Remember, you are a saint. If you have repented of your sins and trusted Christ alone for your salvation, you are no longer a wretched sinner and you are now a saint. But we are afflicted. We are afflicted with this internal, raging battle between our flesh which seeks to do evil and our inner being which delights in the law.

But we can rejoice along with Paul when he wrote, *Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!* In one sense, we can do nothing to remove this affliction except cry out to the Lord for daily help. If you are desperate enough, you will cry out. If you are managing your sin, you don't feel a need to cry out for help.

But even after rejoicing in God's miraculous, continual deliverance, Paul finished this section on somewhat of a down note. *So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.* This leads to our final point.

6. I will fight and grow until I die

I sort of wish that Paul had ended with the first half of verse 25 when he was rejoicing and left off the second half where he is still struggling. Isn't it interesting that he ended that way? He wants us to know that we are at war. We are afflicted with a relentless enemy, but it's an enemy that lives within us. You know the old saying, "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak"? The flesh is not weak. The flesh is powerful and it will defeat you unless you fight back. But I already said that there is nothing that we can do, that we don't have the ability to win this battle. Therefore, how do we work hard at doing nothing?

I think the secret lies in Col. 1.28-29. *Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.*

I toil = The word here means severe labor, strenuous exertion, weariness as though one had been beaten. This is the way you feel after a hard workout or long day of manual labor. You are

exhausted and totally spent. This is the kind of effort we are supposed to put into fighting this war within us.

struggling = the Greek word is agonizomai, from where we get our word agonizing. We toil in an agonizing way.

with all HIS energy = We can struggle so hard because we are using God's energy. We don't have the ability--the power--because we are to use God's power.

that he powerfully (dynamite) works (energizes) within me.

We are saints who are afflicted with our flesh. If we are desperate enough, we will cry out to the Lord to help us fight this important battle.

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