

June 22, 2014
“Abba Living”
Romans 7:21-8:18

Romans 7:21 – 8:1 (no chapter and verses in origin writings, this is one continuous thought from Paul)

I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love God's law with all my heart. But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. So you see how it is: In my mind I really want to obey God's law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin. So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus.

Even though you may agree with God's law, even love God's law; Even though you may agree that the law is right when it says you must not (see Exodus 20:3-17):

Have any other god but the God of the Bible
Make for yourself an idol
Misuse the name of the LORD

And that you must:

Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.
Honor your father and mother.

And you must not:

Murder or hate others.
Commit adultery or even look lustfully at others.
Steal
Lie
Covet

Even though you agree you find yourself breaking these laws. Why is that? We know what we shouldn't do, but we do it anyway; we know what we should do, then we don't do it. Our problem is a sinful nature. We have a bent or an inclination to sin.

You admit the law is right and in your mind you want to keep it, but there is a power in you, a sinful nature keeping you from doing as you ought.

Sin results in death; physical death and spiritual death. Physical death was not what God wanted, but physical death came because of sin, and sin also results in spiritual death or separation from a holy God. So if we are slaves to sin, and sin causes death is there any hope for us, can anyone do anything for us? The answer, thank God is yes, in Jesus Christ.

(Romans 8:1-3) So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death. And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death... God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have [Jesus has same body, not the same (sinful) nature]. And in that body God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins.

If you belong to Christ, that is if you have asked Him to be your Savior and Lord, to forgive your sin, and come into your life, then He has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death and now the Spirit of Christ is in you and by that Spirit you have power to say no to sin.

Romans 8:5-6

Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but [you are not to do that anymore – don't keep your mind on sinful things that will lead to sin] those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death [when you think about sinful things, you will do sinful things, and being controlled by your sinful nature leads to death]. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace.

In other words when you are tempted you have a choice to choose death or to choose life and peace. You can choose to be controlled by the sinful nature (death), or you can choose to put to death those misdeeds and live under the control and influence of the Holy Spirit (life and peace).

In Romans 8:9 when Paul says, But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you. "And remember that those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them do not belong to him at all" that's not a threat, or a warning, Paul is simply stating a fact. If you don't have the Spirit of Christ you do not belong to Him, when you belong to Him you have His Spirit, the Holy Spirit and you ought to be completely controlled by the Holy Spirit. No longer controlled by your sinful nature, you are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you.

So Paul says in Romans 8:12-14, "Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do [you don't owe it anything]. For if you live by its dictates, you will die. But if through the power of the Spirit you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

In Romans 8:15-16 Paul uses adoption to illustrate the believer's new relationship with God and his or her privileges as part of God's family.

Romans 8:15-16

You received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, "Abba, Father." For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children.

In Roman culture, the adopted person lost all rights in his old family and gained all the rights of a legitimate child in his new family. He became a full heir to his new family. Likewise, when a person becomes a Christian, he or she gains all the privileges and responsibilities of a child in God's family. One of these outstanding privileges is being led by the Spirit.

Galatians 4:5-6

God sent (His Son Jesus) to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, "Abba, Father."

When Paul uses the expression, "Abba, Father," he is talking about intimacy with God which is available to all through Christ. This intimacy is the work of the Spirit, we simply add faith. This assurance John Wesley called the "witness of the Spirit" – the heartfelt belief that we are children of God. "Abba living" is the inward confidence in our standing with God. Abba living is the assurance that we are children of God and that the Holy Spirit comes alongside our spirits.

You have God's Spirit, and you must trust and stay connected and be dependent on God's Spirit, for by the Spirit's power you put to death the old ways of life and put on the ways of Christ. How do you stay connected?

When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane He told His disciples:

Matthew 26:41

Keep watch and pray, so that you will not give in to temptation. For the spirit is willing, but the body is weak!"

Jesus said we need three things vigilance, prayer, and resisting temptation. What things will help you to keep watch / vigilant? Being in the Word and applying it to your life. Next pray, what better way to stay connected to the Holy Spirit? And then, dependant on and empowered by the Spirit, resist temptation, flee from it and do God's will instead.

Staying connected to God is not necessarily easy, we have to work at it. Last week I used the illustration of baseball let me use baseball again as an illustration. God wants us to become "Major League" players. Unfortunately, we find that difficult and choose to become spectators instead – we become fans instead of players, fans of Jesus rather than followers of Jesus. We walk off the playing field and sit in the stands, mere fans of the faith. If that has happened to you, get up out of your seat in the bleachers, pick up your bat, and get back in the game.

Our human desire is to be independent and go our own way. We follow the god we created rather than the God who created us. We follow the god of our choosing, God how we see Him or want Him to be. We live controlled by our sinful nature, rather than controlled by the Spirit of God.

Last week I talked about the life of Joseph, today I want to talk about Joseph's father, Jacob. Jacob is the best example in Scripture of someone who wanted God's blessing while going his own way. Jacob's name can be translated as supplanter or one who supersedes by force or plotting; one who succeeds by being a trickster. And that is how Jacob lived his life. Remember what we talked about last week? When people are not connected to God they are likely to compromise on their character. Once they've done that, it's just another small step to do damage to their relationships. That was Jacob. He lied to his father and to his brother, Esau. Esau was so enraged he wanted to kill Jacob. So Jacob runs for his life, heading out to his uncle Laban's house for his own safety. Along the way Jacob has a vision, in which God said to him,

Genesis 28:13-15

"I am the LORD, the God of your grandfather Abraham, and the God of your father, Isaac. The ground you are lying on belongs to you. I am giving it to you and your descendants. Your descendants will be as numerous as the dust of the earth! They will spread out in all directions—to the west and the east, to the north and the south. And all the families of the earth will be blessed through you and your descendants. What's more, I am with you, and I will protect you wherever you go. One day I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have finished giving you everything I have promised you."

Wow! Quite a promise. What was Jacob's response?

Genesis 28:20-21

Then Jacob made this vow: "*if* God will indeed be with me and protect me on this journey, and *if* he will provide me with food and clothing, and *if* I return safely to my father's home, *then* the LORD will certainly be my God.

Pretty weak response, don't you think? But let's not condemn Jacob too quickly. Our response to Christ and His promises of life can also be weak.

As you read Jacob's story you think he's never going to change. He's always working his own angles. But then something happened to Jacob that changed everything for him. On his way back to his homeland, facing the possibility that his brother Esau will kill him and all his family, Jacob found himself in a wrestling match. It was the first time Jacob met God on God's terms.

Genesis 32:24-30

This left Jacob all alone in the camp, and a man came and wrestled with him until the dawn began to break. When the man saw that he would not win the match, he

touched Jacob's hip and wrenched it out of its socket. Then the man said, "Let me go, for the dawn is breaking!"

But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

"What is your name?" the man asked.

He replied, "Jacob."

"Your name will no longer be Jacob," the man told him. "From now on you will be called Israel, because you have fought with God and with men and have won."

"Please tell me your name," Jacob said.

"Why do you want to know my name?" the man replied. Then he blessed Jacob there.

Jacob named the place Peniel (which means "face of God"), for he said, "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been spared."

Did you ever read this story and wonder why this representative of God, perhaps the Lord Jesus Himself would ask Jacob his name? Certainly He knew his name. So He wasn't asking for information. What if He was asking for a confession? The last time Jacob was asked that question he lied and said he was Esau (many times we also try to be someone we're not). But this time and probably for the first time in his life – Jacob was honest with himself and with God. He replied, "Jacob" – the trickster. And what is he told? "Your name will no longer be Jacob. From now on you will be called Israel." What does Israel mean? Some scholars say it means either, "he strives with God," or "let God rule."

All his life prior to that night, Jacob lived his own way. But on that night God put Jacob in his place - powerless and wholly dependent on God. He finally understood that God didn't owe him, He owned him. When God asked him who he was, Jacob didn't pretend to be someone else. He confessed who he was, the trickster. And even though God had no reason to do so, He blessed Jacob and gave him a new identity.

What if that is God intention for you? You and your sinful nature are not in control of your life, that only leads to death. You cannot have life and peace your own way. We wrestle with God or strive with God, instead we should say, "let God rule!"

Power, success, happiness, as the world knows them, are his who will fight for them hard enough; but peace, love, joy, are only from God. And God is the enemy whom Jacob fought there by the river, of course, and whom in one way or another we all of us fight – God, the beloved enemy. Our enemy because, before giving us everything, He demands of us everything; before giving us life, He demands our lives – our selves, our wills, our treasure." - Frederick Buechner, *The Magnificent Defeat*

It took Jacob twenty years to confess who he was before God and finally experience a breakthrough, and give his life fully to God. How long will it take you to submit fully to God? God can't bless who you want to be. He can only bless who He created you to be. If you want to have life and peace, you must live not according to your sinful nature but with His power.

Putting to death the deeds of the sinful nature and living controlled by the Spirit is not easy. Jacob had to wrestle with God all night to receive His blessing. Jacob hung in there for dear life. He didn't want to lose God's blessing – he didn't want to miss it.

If you want a deeper faith, and a fuller life you have to strive for it, but the good news is that God promises He will connect with us if we do that. First you must surrender fully to the Lord Jesus Christ, then the power of the life-giving Spirit will free you from the power of sin that leads to death. You have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do, rather through the power of the Spirit put to death the deeds of your sinful nature and you will have life and peace. All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.