

Matthew 5: 8e – “Blessed are the Pure in Heart” (The Great Struggle for Purity),
Sermon # 11 in a series entitled – “These Sayings of Mine”,
Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on March 1st, 2020,
in the Morning Worship Service.

Today I want to speak to you about the victory in Jesus that is always given to the believer who is looking to Christ in faith, and going about to do God’s will. Last Sunday I spoke to you about practicing righteousness and what that means. As a Christian you practice righteousness from the basis of your having been born again and your having believed the gospel. You now understand that the Lord Jesus has begun a good work in you. You understand that His life is in your life. You believe Paul’s words in Galatians 2: 20, that it is no longer you who lives but Christ who lives in you. Your identity as a person is directly related to Christ. You are no longer the person that you once were in the flesh. Your Old Man was crucified with Christ at the cross and You now have a New Nature. The seed of righteousness has been planted in your soul, and it will grow up into a tree; a good tree which will produce good fruit.

But today I want to show you from the scriptures that God’s working in you to make you holy, will be a life-long interactive work in your heart, and in your life. You as a Christian will face a great struggle for purity of heart at many points. But let your heart take courage Christian; When you look to Christ to make progress in holiness, you will be victorious. And so, I want to look 1st, at the glorious idea that we are no longer married to the law, but to Christ. 2nd – We will look at our wretched experience of the inward law remaining and dwelling with us. And 3rd – Next week, will look at the Victorious Experience of having the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, in our life. The focus of our study today will be upon Romans 7.

1st – Let us look at the glorious idea that we are no longer married to the law, but to Christ.

Turn with me over to Romans chapter 7. I hope that you, like me, think of Romans 7: 1-4 and Romans 7: 13-25 as referring to the experience of a believer, for that is what is being described here. There are some Christians who do believe that. But I hope that after we look at these verses more closely, you will agree that this can be nothing but a believer who is being spoken of. This chapter comes after Romans 6 and not before it, and because of that fact, it is very evident that Paul is not describing an unbeliever, but he is describing the agony and the perplexity of a sincere believer attempting to deal with the indwelling remaining corruption in their heart. In chapter 6, we see that everything that Paul speaks about there flows from the question in verse 1: Shall the believer continue in sin that grace may abound? He says – Certainly not!

All that takes place in a person’s having received initial sanctification in connection with the New Birth, their being buried with Christ in Spirit baptism (verse 4), their being united together with Him (planted together with Him) in the likeness of His death and resurrection (verse 5); their initial sanctification, the Old Man being crucified with Christ so that the body of sin might be done away with (verse 6), that we should no longer be slaves of sin; all this proves that Paul has all along been speaking about a believer, and that he is continuing to do so in chapter 7.

So look at verse 1 with me then, of Chapter 7. “Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives?” “For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives.” “But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband.” “So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man.” “Therefore,

my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another – to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God.”

We see from the context here, that the “law” that is being spoken of is the law of the 10 commandments because the particular commandment under consideration is the 7th commandment – You shall not commit adultery. A woman is bound to her husband as long as she lives, and if she marries another man while he is still alive, then she will be called an adulteress. If her husband dies, however, she is released from the law of her husband. That is, the law of her marriage to him. But if he dies, she is free to marry another man, and in marrying him, she is no adulteress.

But, interestingly, Paul uses this illustration to show us that it is not the law who actually died, but it was rather us who were married to the law, that died. We were made to spiritually die to the law’s condemning us for not fulfilling his righteous requirements. We were made to die through the body of Christ, when He died on the cross. And so, since Christ fulfilled all the righteous requirements of the law on our behalf, and since He suffered all the just punishment for our sins, He was able to so satisfy the law, so that it was no problem for the law to transfer the custody of us to Himself. Our marital relationship to the law ceased. We still love the law, but we are no longer married to the law. All this, of course, we are saying in the context of the law being personified and all sinners by nature being married to him. The purpose of Paul’s saying this verse 5, is so we should bear fruit to God; that is, in holiness.

Do you see the victory that is given to every Christian through their believing in Christ’s death? It is through faith in Christ’s death that you were not only able to experience a real death to sin in your heart at your conversion, but you also have become dead to the law, through the body of Christ. Christ fulfilled the moral law on your behalf, and He suffered the punishment that was due to all of your sins. And He undertook the great work of winning you to be His spiritual spouse. It is really quite shocking to think of what Christ did. He being God became a Man, He took on human flesh, and He said to God the Father concerning His holy law – Behold, I come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me.” “I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within My heart.” The same quote is used in the book of Hebrews in chapter 10, verse 10, where it says – “By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

That is, you, when you believed in Christ, were made holy, set apart to God’s working in you to make you holy. Your heart was purified and you were set apart to the working of the blessed Holy Spirit in your heart. You now glory in the truth of His leading us into all the truth of how we can please God by a faithful obedience to His word. What does it mean that you died to the law? Does it mean that you never have anything more to do with him after your believing in Christ? No, but you have an entirely new relationship to Him. You love him – “O how I love your law, O Lord.” “It is my meditation all the day. Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies for they are ever mine.” You love the law because Christ fulfilled it, and you in your salvation know that the law has been written upon your heart in the covenant of grace. You love the law because You remember that Christ delighted in it. He delighted in doing God’s will in His keeping it. And so you go about to keep it, because you love Christ, your spiritual husband.

These verses would have you think of him, the law, in this way: Before you were saved, you were married to the law, and the law had dominion over you as long as long as you lived. As long as you were under his legal jurisdiction, you were married to him, spiritually speaking. He was a faithful husband to you, but he always pointed out your every fault, and he was never fully satisfied with the best obedience that you could give him. You didn’t feel like he could relax around you, or you around him. He didn’t seem to want to ever accept you as you were, no matter how much you tried to please him. He insisted that you be perfect, and he would look angrily at you when you broke his laws. Under his husbandly scrutiny, you kept trying to justify

yourself by keeping his commandments by your own righteousness. Your own righteousness was never enough, was it? But now, having died to him, being married to him, and being married to Christ, who always did what was right and suffered for your sins, you are now free in the Spirit, to live to Christ. You are not under law, you are under grace.

It is true that here in Romans 7: 5-12 that Paul takes us back in our experience to before we were converted, and he speaks of what our experience was like then, in relation to the law, when we were in the flesh: Verse 5 says – “The sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death.” But now, (when a person becomes a Christian) Paul says – “We have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter of the law. He then asks – “Is the law sin?”, in verse 7. “Certainly not”.

And then he goes on in verses 7-12, to us about his own experience of coming to understand the spirituality of the law. He tells us how he found out that his own efforts at righteousness were not going to be enough to save him from his heart sins. He says that he came to realize that he had not known how guilty he was, of the sin of covetousness; and that when he tried to keep that commandment in his own strength, that sin, taking the opportunity by the commandment, produced in him all manner of evil desire. He said that he was alive once without the law’s convicting power being reinforced by the Holy Spirit. He thought highly of his own supposed righteousness, and how blameless he supposedly was, but when the commandment came with power, saying do this and live, keep this commandment of not coveting, he could not at all do it. The strength of sin was so aroused in him that he died to the whole idea of his own righteousness being enough. He knew his self-righteousness was slain. He could not keep the law on his own, without Christ’s grace, and help; without His mediation, and His intercession.

How did Paul view sin, now that he had seen its deceitfulness in his own heart? He viewed sin as exceedingly sinful. He now knew that the law was spiritual, but he understood himself to be carnal, sold under sin. In what sense could Paul say, after he has related so much wonderful truth to us about initial sanctification, that a Christian is carnal? If a Christian is carnal, where is the victory that we have been promised in Christ? Well, be patient dear Christian, and you will understand. It is coming, but you must hear Paul out on this next point.

2^{ndly} – We need to think about the inward law of remaining sin.

Verse 14 says – “For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.” You will say to me – How could Paul possibly see himself in this way, when he was so gloriously saved on the road to Damascus, and after he got his sight back, he began to preach so powerfully, the gospel of Christ? He said that he had been set free from sin. He said in verse 14 of chapter 6 that sin does not have dominion over us. A Christian cannot be a carnal Christian can they? They can’t be carnal and spiritual all at the same time, can they? I would remind you of what I preached to you last Sunday about the Christian’s perfect New Nature; that because of this he will not practice sin; he will not be committing sin, because he is born of God. His greatest and highest desire since he came to faith in Christ is to be holy and to do what is right.

And Paul himself would remind you of what he says in Galatians 2: 20. It is not you who live now, as a Christian; it is Christ who lives in you. You are a new person, with a new identity in Christ. You do indeed have a New Nature and you have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit. You have indeed died to sin and you are now alive to righteousness. You are the Lord’s servant now, but Paul knew that you will not really learn how to become holy, without first understanding in what sense you are carnal, as a Christian. A Christian is carnal, and sold under sin, not because they practice sin but because they still have a law or a principle of evil, remaining in them, after conversion, which will still seek to lead them into sin if not resisted and overcome by deliberate efforts and acts of putting sin off, and putting it to death, as it arises in their heart.

Paul speaks in this way, calling himself carnal, because he doesn't want you to be deceived. He expresses all these thoughts of verses 14-24 in the first person because he is using himself as an example of all believers. He does not want you to be deceived by thinking that it is just some Christians who are carnal, and sold under sin. He wants you to see that all Christians, even the most spiritual of Christians, like himself, are all carnal and sold under sin in this particular way that we are speaking of. They still have within them the remains of the Old Nature! Paul states it plainly - "I am carnal". He does not say - "I was carnal, sold under sin". He says - I am carnal. This does not mean that he was not a holy man of God. It means that he knew that he still had a daily fight on his hands with the Old Man and he wanted us to know that we would experience this same fight; this same struggle as he had experienced.

In verse 15, he relates how it was in in his own heart - "For what I am doing, I do not understand." "For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do." Notice that Paul has a will to do what is right but he does not practice it perfectly. Rather he sometimes does what he hates. Now, all the good doings of his heart were, no doubt, motions of his New Heart and mind, and that he according to his New Nature was very willing to do what was right. But these good thoughts were being opposed by a great reluctance put forward by his flesh, not to practice righteousness in relation to self-denial and Christ, but rather to go back to thinking that he could live his Christian life with a fleshly kind of confidence and use the worldly principles of being proud of himself in relation to the things that he could do.

And sometimes he would also go the other way and doubt that he could accomplish all that the Lord had called him to do in righteousness and spreading the truth of the gospel, and he would feel the temptation to put down the spiritual sword and not fight the good fight of faith. Sometimes he did not feel like denying himself and picking up his cross and following Christ when he was so opposed by people around him. At all times he knew that he had to be on guard against these sinful impulses, and he had to take action against them. He knew that if he let himself go, he would not practice prompt obedience, and thus it was possible that many acts of righteousness and labors for the Lord would not be done if he listened to the inner voice of temptation or compromise, coming from his flesh.

By the way, I do not think that he was talking about the commission of some great sin or crime which he would repeated again and again. This would have disqualified him from be able to fulfill his ministry, and proved him not to be a godly person at all. He was not speaking of an evil course of life that he would fall into for a time and then repent of it. Paul was an externally moral man, even before his conversion to Christ. Rather I believe that he was talking about internal lusts and desires, the meditations of what remained of his carnal mind, in relation to all the different commands of God's law, and His word that he was going about to keep. These were the real actings of his fleshly mind that he knew that he needed to mortify.

In verse 16 he says - If, then I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good." "But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me." "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find." "For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice." The evil he willed not to do, and which he practiced was his not knowing how he could be able to be consistent in holiness in his mind and heart in relation to overcoming every one of these unrighteous impulses and motions of his heart in a permanent sense. It was troublesome to him, and he did not want to have to repent and mourn over himself any longer in his thoughts.

It was very distressing to him. And it should be to us as well, in regard to the many unbelieving, sinfully selfish, unthoughtful and unloving thoughts that may go through our minds. This "law" in his members applies to all sins which we may tolerate in our mind and heart, which may or may not lead to actual outward sins committed, or righteousness neglected.

It is possible, and it does happen, that violations of God's law can take place in the heart without ever coming out in the actions in any way that it can be perceived by other people, even when you are a Christian. He goes on to explain in verse 20 that if he does what he wills not to do, it is no longer he, Paul, who is doing it, but sin that dwells in him. This is what I was trying to tell you about last Sunday. A Christian should always by faith look at himself in terms of what he is in Christ; having that perfect seed remaining in him and the Holy Spirit leading him in his life. It is not at all the express intention of any true Christian to continue to sin in any way, whether it is in doubts or unbelief, or pride and selfish ambition, or envy and strife. They do not want to dishonor God through any pursuit of sensuality or immoral thoughts. They do not in any way intend to tolerate anger or bitterness for any length of time. But it is possible that it can happen. Paul found this law, that evil was present with him, the one who willed to do good. But he was delighting in the law of God according to the inward man.

This is how we know that this is a Christian speaking here. An unbeliever may delight in the law of God in an outward way, like Paul did before his conversion. But it is only the true believer who can delight in the law of God after the inward man. Paul saw this law in his members bringing him into captivity to the law of sin which was in his members, and so he cried out in anguish – “O wretched man that I am!” “Who will deliver me from this body of death?” “I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!” Have you experienced this, dear Christian, in your heart? I know that I have; many times. A Christian can never justify their falling into sin, or in any way tolerating sin in the heart and life. They will mourn over it when they find it in their heart, and may have to repent over various sins of their heart many times during the course of their Christian life.

Why? Because sinful thoughts can arise in your mind and the heart often; thoughts and feelings which are not right which you may meditate on. You will find these thoughts in your heart, as little foxes which are ruining the vineyard, spoiling the vines, trying to eat the good grapes, the good fruit, the good thoughts of holiness, as it says in Song of Solomon 2: 15. You hear them mentioned as little diabolonians who try to wreak havoc on Mansoul, as John Bunyan puts it in his book the Holy War. You should know that Christ can give you the victory over these, however and whenever they show up in your heart. You will by His power and grace, come to know how to make progress in overcoming these fleshly desires, thoughts, and deeds. The Lord will subdue all of your iniquities, so that they will not have the strength that they once had in your life, although you will always have to be watchful against them. So, Paul says in verse 25, “with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.”

As I come towards the close of this sermon, let me read to you a little of Charles Haddon Spurgeon's experience in this regard. He says – “I think about five days after I first found Christ, when my joy had been such that could have danced for very mirth at the thought that Christ was mine, on a sudden I fell into a sad fit of despondency. I can tell now why it was so with me. When I first believed in Christ, I am not sure that I thought the devil was dead, but certainly I had a kind of notion that he was so mortally wounded that he could not disturb me. And then I also fancied that the corruption of my nature had received its death-blow. I read what Cowper said, – “Since the dear hour that brought me to “Thy foot, And cut up all my follies by the root;” and I really thought that the poet knew what he was saying; whereas, never did anyone blunder so terribly as Cowper did when he said that, for no man, I think, has all his follies thus cut up by the roots. However, I fondly dreamed that mine were, I felt persuaded they would never sprout again. I was going to be perfect, – I fully calculated upon it, – and lo, I found an intruder I had not reckoned upon, an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.

So I went to that same Primitive Methodist Chapel where I first received peace with God, through the simple preaching of the Word. The text happened to be, “O wretched man that I am: who shall deliver me from the body of this death?... There,” I thought, “that's the text for me.” I

had just got as far as that in the week. I knew that I had put my trust in Christ, and I knew that, when I sat in that house of prayer, my faith was simply and solely fixed on the atonement of the Redeemer. But I had a weight on my mind, because I could not be as holy as I wanted to be. I could not live without sin. When I rose in the morning, I thought I would abstain from every hard word, from every evil thought and look; and I came up to that chapel groaning because, “when I would do good, evil was present with me.”

“The minister began by saying, ‘Paul was not a believer when he said this. Well now, I knew I was a believer, and it seemed to me from the context that Paul must have been a believer, too. (Now, I am sure he was.) The man went on to say that no child of God ever did feel any conflict within. So I took up my hat, and left the chapel, and I have very seldom attended such places since. They are very good for people who are unconverted to go to, but of very little use for children of God. That is my notion of Methodism. It is a noble thing to bring in strangers; but a terrible thing for those that are brought in to sit and feed there. It is like the parish pound, it is a good place to put sheep in when they have strayed, but there is no food inside; they had better be let out as soon as possible to find some grass. I saw that that minister understood nothing of experimental divinity, or of practical heart theology, or else he would not have talked as he did. A good man he was, I do not doubt, but utterly incompetent to the task of dealing with a case like mine.’ (end of quote)

Brethren, I agree with Spurgeon’s analysis. Let us not believe in the doctrine of Christian Perfection as taught by John Wesley. Let us see that sanctification is not found by receiving it by an act of faith. Let us see that sin is not simply a transgression against a known law. It is grappling with the unknown law of your sinful flesh; the sinful motions and thoughts of your heart. As a Christian you will no doubt come to know the plague of your own heart, and you will have to learn to do battle every day with your flesh. Sinful thoughts will come unbidden by you, to your attention. It is true that we must fight against all such thoughts, and repent of them, and mortify them, as often as we need to. Let us pursue holiness and persevere in holiness. For, without that holiness no person will see the Lord. But the pure in heart shall see God because they have cleansed themselves, and they will cleanse themselves, from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

And so, let us also see that the perfection that the Christian strives for, is also a much greater and more extensive thing than just having the impression that I have not sinned in awhile. The perfection that the Bible tells us to strive for is the perfection of sincere obedience to God’s word at all times and every point. It is learning to do right thing in relation to each and every person that we come into contact with every day. You will need to pray to have the grace to live out the wisdom shown to you in the Bible; praying in the Holy Spirit for wisdom from above, which as James says is first pure and then peaceable, then gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. This fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. If you have this brethren, you are making progress in holiness, and God through Christ can approve of your works.