

The Conscience

STUDY FOUR - Indwelling Sin

Ray Bell ~ 22nd September, 2016

Last week we heard that, in Christ, God has done what the Old Testament law and sacrifices could not do– he has taken away our sin, cleansed our conscience and perfected those who are being sanctified.

We have been washed and cleansed, freed from the guilt of our sin, and from its power and its penalty. Our conscience can now function without fear of judgment, without guilt, and without shame. We can now relate with God and draw near to him with the full assurance of faith. And, we can relate to one another without the obstructions of guilt and shame. Having our consciences cleansed from dead works, we can now serve the living God.

Paul speaks of the wonderful freedom he knows in his *own* conscience in **1 Corinthians 4:1-5**. And, in **2 Corinthians 5:16-21**, he shows us how we are to see *one another* in the same light. **Yet**, there is still this problem we have, called 'indwelling sin'.

Romans 7 tells the story of a man deep in the battle of conscience. There are echoes of the image of 'sin crouching at your door' from Genesis 4 here, especially in verses 9-11 and verse 17. We all know something of the truth and the battle Paul presents here. He is not denying his own responsibility in the matter (cf. v12 - the law is GOOD!), but he is saying that sin is something other than just what he does, or doesn't do, say, or think. **Sin is an entity in and of itself**, with a 'life' and 'agenda' of its own! And, it is more powerful than he is, of himself.

We are free in Christ– free from the penalty and power of sin, but not yet free from the presence of it! And so, together with Paul, we find this same war waging in our own lives. And if, like Cain, we try to deal with our sin and guilt and our fallen predicament ourselves, taking matters into our own hands, we will only end up more angry, more depressed and thoroughly exhausted by it. However, even this experience is God's good gift to us, as he brings us to our knees before him, and him alone, to find rest for our souls (verse 25). **It is here**, in the absolute '*despair* of faith' that we are ripe and ready to receive the total '*assurance* of faith'!

It is important to note that **Romans 7 does not conclude at the end of verse 24**. Nor does Paul's argument finish at the end of Romans 7. In fact, Romans 7:25 leads directly into Romans 8:1ff. **It is in the midst of this battle** that we need to read on– to hear and take to heart the word of God which speaks truth to our conscience when everything else would have us believe a lie, or only half of the truth.

Hebrews 10:11-18 tells us of a 'two-fold' work of the Holy Spirit:

- he tells us of the new covenant promise regarding the law being written on our hearts and minds;
- and he then tells us of the gospel truth that **God will remember our sins no more!**

Paul presents something similar, in 'reverse order', in Romans 8 where he declares in verse 1 that "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" and later tells of the Spirit who "bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God."

When we find ourselves in this battle of the conscience with indwelling sin, yes, we must 'resist the devil' and 'flee from sin' but first and foremost we must listen to the Spirit, hear the Word of God and believe it! Believe God! None of this will make what God has done any more or less true (the effectual work of Christ on the cross is finished!), but it does remind us of that completed work and gives faith something to hear and cling to when every other voice in our head, often including our own, tells us otherwise.

It's here that our **baptism** can be a wonderful encouragement and reminder to us as this war wages within us (Romans 6:1-4). As the Spirit testifies to our spirit that we are children of God, he reminds of what has taken place through our baptism into Christ—that we have died with Christ and have been raised with him to walk in newness of life. We must not read Romans 7, nor attempt to deal with our indwelling sin (or anyone else's) without the chapters either side of Romans 7 (and include Chpt 5 for good measure too).

Consider the following words of God which can encourage us to persevere and hold fast to the hope of our confession *as the Father holds us*, in Christ, through the battles and the war waging in our members:

"Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:1)

"Hope does not disappoint us because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit." (Romans 5:5)

"Consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." (Romans 6:11)

"You have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life." (Romans 6:22)

"We serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit." (Romans 7:6)

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1)

"You have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba Father!" (Romans 8:15)

"[Nothing] in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:39)

God has always provided a physical means for us to know and remember his faithful presence and provision of grace— from the animal skins given to Adam and Eve, to the law written on stone tablets; from Jesus himself, the Incarnate Word of God, to the practices of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. These New Covenant 'rituals' remind us of the finished and effectual work of Christ that he endured for our sake. Therefore, in the ongoing battles and the war waging within us as a result of indwelling sin, God has given us tangible reminders of his goodness and grace and the forgiveness of our sins until the day we see him face to face - when we will no longer need any other evidence or reminder!