

Enough is Enough

By Senior Pastor Tom Harrison

July 28, 2019

I agree with Psalm 19 - the Old Testament Law is good, true and wondrous. (I normally quote 19:14 after we've stood to read the scripture together in worship.) However, the Law also reminds me of a "tattle tale." After we mess up ("sin"), the Law runs off and tells God we've been bad. The evidence is indisputable – we ARE guilty. The Law ("The Rules") are meant for our benefit, but we can't keep them. The Law is like a parent, teacher, coach, boss, etc., telling us we're not good enough and don't measure up. Paul tried so hard to keep the Law that he led in persecuting Christians. His zeal was unenlightened. Until he became a follower of Jesus, he didn't understand he was both self-righteous and unrighteous.

It is hard to believe Paul wrote this –after his conversion it seemed he always had it together. We see some of his struggles here (also in 2 Timothy 4). We take comfort in knowing that even the greatest among us have "feet of clay." His strong deliverer was Jesus Christ. In his famous "thorn in the flesh" passage (2 Corinthians 9), Paul explains God's grace is sufficient in weakness. This is a wonderful introduction to one of the greatest chapters in the Bible, Romans 8. APPLICATION: Our "Celebrate Recovery" reminds us – we all have "hurt, habits and hang-ups." Confessing our need is a huge step to healing. Is there a confession you need to make? Do you have fellow believers in your life you can talk to about your struggles? Are you someone others feel safe to confess to you?

One of the most controversial texts in the Bible. There are several ways to interpret it. I'll simplify with 2

#1.) Paul is writing **about Christians** struggling with sin. In support of this argument: He writes in the present tense. Unbelievers probably don't wrestle with this struggle like a Christian.

#2.) Paul is describing **unbelievers**. The text sounds like someone who is completely confused and disoriented and has not found Christ. The present tense language could have described Paul before he became a Christian.

Regardless, there is **agreement**. Most agree that Christians struggle with sin through their whole lives.

We must be careful not to read into the text our own experiences. We call that a "proof text" – the text proves what I want it to say. Instead, we try to objectively learn what the scripture is saying. We pull from the text the interpretation and then the application, not vice versa.

Everyone I've ever met wants to have a meaningful life and to do good. However, when we say "I'm free to be myself" it seems we can't suppress the bad. It seems to pop up repeatedly no matter how hard we resist. We never "get over" sin. In fact, the more Christ-like we become, the more we see how far we need to go. We all carry something. We all struggle with sin.

On the other hand, there are some (not many) Christians who teach that once you are a Christian you cannot sin. If you sin, you are no longer a Christian. I met one of these individuals in Sallisaw. Not only did the man say he did not sin, neither did his wife. Their definition of "sin" was quite limited. Swearing was not a sin (he swore – and caused others to swear, too). He had a list of what was sinful and what was not – that corresponded to his strengths and weaknesses.

7:13-24 Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.¹⁴ For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.¹⁵ 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.¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.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.²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

There are 4 movements in this text:

- 1) We were married to the **LAW** (the Old Testament rules and regulations). While it is good, it was an impossible marriage for us.
- 2.) The Law **objectively** defines **SIN** and **subjectively** reveals our Sin (our flesh). St. Augustine in his Confessions described stealing some pears from a vineyard as a boy. The pears weren't particularly colorful or tasty, but he and some buddies shook the tree, stole the fruit, ate some, then threw the rest to the pigs. Their real pleasure was doing something disallowed. He had better pears – he only took these so he could be a thief. If we see a sign that says, "Don't touch the wet paint" or "Keep off the grass" we want to defy the rules. Paul was a golfer – he knew what he was supposed to do – how to hit the shot – but couldn't do it. The 1st

temptation in the garden – the serpent told the original pair “*You will be like God.*” That is the essence of sin. We want to be god. The Law defines and reveals our sin. The Law was good. Our problem is we know the rules but can’t keep them.

3.) **OUR FRUSTRATION** by the combination of the Law’s perfection + our sin.

When in the 10th grade, my friend, Dale, played the saxophone and invited me to play with his orchestra because they needed a guitar player. I did not want to go. Dale INSISTED I come. I finally relented. My problem was, I could only chord and hit some random guitar licks. I couldn’t read music. At the rehearsal, the director kept looking in my direction saying, “*Could I have a little more guitar?*” (I could’ve played the cowbell better). I had absolutely no idea what I was doing. It was a terrible one-hour experience. I was deeply embarrassed (even shamed). I never went back. That orchestral experience for me has been played out numerous times when people get “invited” to come to church. On the one hand, we hear how wonderful God’s Law is. OTOH, we know we can’t “play the music.” We feel guilty, afraid, ashamed – and we want to slink off never to return to the scene of a colossal embarrassment.

4) The passage ends with: “²⁴ *Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*” ²⁵ *Thanks be to God through **Jesus Christ our Lord!***” **JESUS IS LORD.** Paul doesn’t promise to do a little better. **Only Jesus** could help. Trusting in Jesus is the Gospel; not following the rules + trying to improve. We need a new savior. WE are not our savior. We fall short. The Bible does not teach “*God helps those who help themselves.*” Jesus, not our self-help efforts to keep the Law, saves us. Romans 8 is a great passage describing the gift we receive through Jesus. Jesus did not abolish the Law, He fulfilled it. He superseded it. He was full of grace and truth, not more rules and regulations. We do not need more laws – we have enough already, and we cannot keep what we have. Instead of saying, “You must work harder at following the rules” here is the Good News.

Matthew 5:3 “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*”

When we recognize our limits, we open ourselves up to God’s grace.

Matthew 5:7 “*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.* We must receive and extend mercy.

1 Peter 2:10 *Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.* Our identity: “Who are you? Who do you want to be?”

James 2:13 *Mercy triumphs over judgment.* Let’s receive and extend tenderness from God.

Let's not build walls and erect barriers to keep others from God's mercy; let's build onramps to help them find God's mercy and grace.

In his book, The 2nd Mountain, David Brooks describes a project in Ontario using babies to create connections in schools. Once a month a parent/infant visit a classroom. They sit on a green blanket & the class gathers around them to watch the infant. In one class, there was an 8th grade boy, Darren. He had witnessed his mother's murder when he was 4 and had been bounced around the foster care system ever since. He was bigger than everyone else in the class because he was 2 grades behind. One day, to everyone's surprise, he asked if he could hold the baby. He looked scary. The mother was nervous, but she let him. Darren was great with the baby. He went to a quiet corner and rocked the baby while the infant snuggled into his chest. Darren returned the baby to his mother and innocently asked, ***"If nobody has ever loved you, do you think you could still be a good father?"*** This kid had never felt loved.

Isn't what we want in life to be loved, accepted and forgiven? Yet many of us feel unworthy of being loved because we have a problem of some sort. It may be due to our family dynamic. It may be a persistent habit or sin. Maybe we've gone through a divorce or treatment (several times). Maybe some relationship has broken down and we are depressed. *"Am I a worth being loved?"* Many look for love in all the wrong places. Many look for love by following the rules and by being a good person. We naturally go in these directions, sometimes simultaneously. But there is a 3rd way. It is the way of Jesus. No matter how good we are, it's never good enough to save us. No matter how bad we are, it's never bad enough to be beyond God's love in Jesus Christ. Paul was a very good Pharisee. He was so good – he was bad. He killed Christians. But his life changed when he found Jesus, it is enough.

This illustration fits in 2 ways: either it's about the root of sin lying deep within us that we cannot contain...OR, like that bamboo, the heart of the gospel = the resurrection. We can't stop the sin nature, but we also believe Jesus was crucified, cut down and left for dead for the sins of humanity and he came back from the ultimate rejection. The R means what is deadly cannot prevent what gives eternal life.

Today is the time to knock the walls of resistance down & let the mercy & Resurrection power of Jesus come into our hearts. We do not have to make promises we will now be perfect. We all struggle with something all of life. Don't focus on the bamboo – or on our sin – focus upon Jesus – or our savior. Let Jesus come into your heart. Be part of His church. We ALL need Jesus. We need each other. Everyone around you has struggles with something. Everyone needs Jesus.

The great thing about following Jesus is that He gives us His Spirit. That's what Romans 8 is about. That's why we are **HELPING OTHERS FOLLOW JESUS**.