

# Essentials for Spiritual Growth

## Lesson # 3 -- Growing in Freedom from Sin.

### Introduction

- A. One of the most serious areas of spiritual bondage, for the believer, has to do with the **presence and power** of what is called in Scripture by the various terms "flesh," "body of sin," "sinful nature," and "law of sin."

Rom 6:6 -- For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that **the body of sin** might be done away with (paralyzed), that we should no longer be slaves to sin--

Rom 7:18 -- I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in **my sinful nature**. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.

Rom 7:18 -- For I know that in me (that is, in **my flesh KJV**), (**sinful nature NIV**) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.

Rom 7:23 -- but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of **the law of sin** at work within my members.

- B. While the Christian is born anew (John 3:3), is holy (I Cor 1:2), is the temple of the Holy Spirit (I Cor 3:16,17), and has been given the ability to live in freedom and glorify God (Rom 8:28,29), that believer also has an **all-pervasive, profoundly motivating proneness to sin. This perverse predisposition toward evil is a pattern of thought and action which attaches itself to almost every facet and function of the believer.** It is this "sinful nature" and its counterpart the "new nature" ("new man" KJV, "new self" NIV) that we wish to study in this lesson.

- C. While the NIV makes use of the term "sinful nature" it is important not to confuse this sinful presence with our human nature. What the Scripture is talking about is the effect, still present in all believers, of the Fall. While we are fully redeemed, all the benefits have not been applied to us, in an experiential way. Our bodies, for example, are not yet glorified.

## I. Growing in Understanding the Bondage and Ruin Produced by the "Sinful Nature."

A. The "sinful nature" defiles the believer and is a source of evil.

Mark 7:21-23 -- **For from within, out of men's hearts**, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and **make a man 'unclean.'**"

**Comment:** What a potential cesspool is our heart. Note, however, that the presence of the sinful nature is not defiling -- it is when such potential is allowed expression that the defilement becomes a reality. Consider the bondage and the ruin caused by such evil!

B. The "sinful nature" hinders and weakens the believer

Rom 7:15 -20 -- I do not understand what I do. **For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do**, I agree that the law is good. As it is, **it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me**. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in **my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on doing**. Now **if I do what I do not want to do**, it is no longer I who do it, but it is **sin living in me that does it**.

**Comment:** All believers, along with the Apostle Paul, acknowledges this type of bondage and the ruin that it produces. No one would accuse Paul of being a lethargic and disobedient Christian -- in fact he was just the opposite. And yet in this passage he testifies to his inner struggle with an inability to do what he knew he should do, and to a bondage to an evil that he hated.

C. The "sinful nature" is a contradictory element in the believer.

Gal 5:17 -- For the sinful nature desires what is **contrary** to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is **contrary** to the sinful nature. They are in **conflict** with each other, **so that you do not do what you want**.

**Comment:** All Christians recognize this "contrary" element within. We find the presence of thoughts, feelings, and desires that are out of harmony with the leading of the Holy Spirit and our own spiritual goals.

D. The "sinful nature" is a source of sinful actions in the believer.

Gal 5:19-21 -- The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

**Comment:** These verses force every believer to face the potential for evil that dwells within us. Because we have been born again we are not in bondage to such evil (Rom 8:9). However the potential is still there. **And, when we choose to respond to a person or situation in life in the practice of error and sin** -- then the result may be "sexual immorality," "idolatry," "jealousy," "fits of rage," "selfish ambition," "drunkenness," "fear," "manipulation," "causing false guilt," or some other type of evil.

It would be good to stop and consider again -- **the bondage and ruin caused by becoming involved in such error and sin.** Consider how such activity dramatically slows down our spiritual growth, how it causes the Word of God to be "choked" (Matt 13:22), how it grieves and quenches the Holy Spirit, how it opens the door to the enemy, how it makes us vulnerable to the enticement of the world, how it makes us weak before temptation, how it robs us of the Fruit of the Spirit, how it robs those about us of the grace and power of God that we could have brought into their life, and how it deprives us of much of our ability to worship, to pray, to be thankful, to exercise our spiritual gifts, and to glorify God. And, through deception, it keeps us from recognizing our true problem -- and when we become aware we are in trouble -- we usually turn on God and blame Him for treating us in a shabby way! We must learn to be open to the Holy Spirit and one another about these issues.

## II. Growing in the Awareness of Personal Responsibility Regarding the "Sinful Nature."

A. The Bible warns us of the bondage produced by error and sin.

Prov 16:32 -- Better a patient man than a warrior, **a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city.**

Prov 25:28 -- **Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control.**

John 8:34 -- Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, **everyone who sins is a slave to sin.**

Rom 6:12 -- Therefore **do not let sin reign** in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.

Rom 6:16 -- Don't you know that **when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey**--whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?

1 Pet 5:8 -- **Be self-controlled and alert.** Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

2 Pet 2:19 -- They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity-- **for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him.**

**Comment:** There may be many areas of bondage in the life of a believer. Some of these hidden areas are what we may call "self-protective" (anger, fantasy of all kinds, living behind a wall, shyness, pride, self-righteousness, bigotry, being dogmatic, over-controlling, being passive, being emotionally unavailable, a martyr complex, being manipulative, being fearful, and being overly critical) are some common examples. Or some type of error or sin may be deliberately hidden (anger, voyeurism, obsessions, pornography, evil habits, grudges, stealing, unbelief, hypocrisy, unfaithfulness, bitterness, greed, covetousness, and resentment to name only a few). The seriousness of this situation is almost beyond our understanding. Such sins exact a terrible toll in wasted years, unrealized potential, robbing God of His glory, living without joy, power, and fruitfulness in daily life, in our prayer life and service, depriving those about us of the gifts and grace of God that we could have given to them, and one of the most serious consequences -- not growing in the grace and knowledge of God. No wonder Augustine said that "Sin is its own penalty"!

A simple summary of the above is seen in our personal **self-centeredness**. So much of what we want and do is based on selfishness. This is why the Lord Jesus said, " If anyone would come after me, **he must deny himself** and take up his cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34). Every believer must honestly face this basic characteristic of sin within and honestly deal with it. To be in bondage to ourselves, in self-centeredness, is a serious type of idolatry. God made us to live for Him and to please Him. The Fall reversed this divine order. Only in loving Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength will we be enabled to walk in freedom from sin and find fulfillment, (Jer 9:23,24; John 15:11). **This truth is a major key to spiritual freedom. Without honest rejection of self-centeredness, and its obsession with "my needs, my problems, my appearance, my relationships, my progress, my peace, my comfort, my enjoyment, my spirituality, my gifts ...." there is no hope of a true walk with God.**

B. The Bible warns us of the deception that accompanies the practice of error and sin.

Gal 6:7 -- **Do not be deceived:** God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.

James 1:14 -- But each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. **Don't be deceived,** my dear brothers.

James 1:22 -- Do not merely listen to the word, and so **deceive yourselves**. Do what it says.

1 John 1:8 -- If we claim to be without sin, **we deceive ourselves** and the truth is not in us.

**Comment:** The only way we are going to be free from such deception is by approaching the Word of God with a choice to be honest, be willing to evaluate our thoughts, emotions, and actions on the basis of the Bible, be willing to discuss these issues with other Christians, and most of all pray that the Holy Spirit would give us discernment.

### III. Growing in Understanding God's Provision Regarding Our "Sinful Nature."

A. The Provision of the Lord Jesus -- our Holiness.

1 Cor 1:30 -- It is because of him that you are **in Christ Jesus**, who has become for us wisdom from God--that is, our righteousness, **holiness** and redemption.

**Comment:** It is significant that the translators of the KJV utilized the word "sanctification" (instead of holiness) in this verse. They were trying to show that the Lord Jesus was not only our **holiness in a legal sense, but that He was/is our source of holiness for daily life**. It is helpful to keep in mind that the Lord Jesus, Who dwells within us by the Holy Spirit, has a great desire to make us like Himself (Rom 8:28,29). He has the love, the wisdom, and the power to do so. He wants to enable us to enter into freedom from sin and enjoy living a holy life.

B. The provision of the Crucifixion.

Rom 6:3 -- Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus **were baptized into his death?**

Rom 6:6 -- For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with (rendered inoperative, Wuest) , **that we should no longer be slaves to sin--**

**Comment:** The Lord Jesus died on the cross as our Representative. We were there, in that redemptive act -- by identification. He took our sin, our "old self," our "sinful nature" down into that act of Crucifixion and dealt with it.

The term "old self" is all that we were before salvation.

The term "body of sin" refers to how we as believers manifest or act out our sin. The reference is to "mortal body" in V12, to "parts of your body" in V13 and to "members of my body" in 7:23.

**An understanding of this verse and its consistent practice is vitally important for spiritual freedom. Paul's reference to "body of sin" and "members" reminds us that the way we express our "sinful nature" is through our functions: mind, emotions and will -- (our soul) -- through sight, hearing, speaking, touching, desiring, etc.**

1. We must thoroughly dedicate ourselves and our functions to God -- and do so every day.
2. We must become aware of areas of special weakness and vulnerability and be vigilant.
3. When aware of some sin -- at its very outset -- pray and commit it to Jesus Christ and His death. "Lord Jesus, I nail this selfishness, this immoral desire, etc., to Your cross. I lay Your cross on my life and receive Your deliverance."

The words "done away with" may be translated "rendered inoperative," as Kenneth Wuest does *Word Studies*, or as "paralyzed" as James Dunn in *Commentary on Romans*. The emphasis is on the powerful effect of the Crucifixion. When we are willing to appropriate

that power in honest cooperation with God -- the sinful power of our "sinful nature" can be **PARALYZED!** That is the wonderful freedom the Lord Jesus has provided for us.

C. The provision of the Resurrection.

Rom 6:4 -- We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, **just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.**

**Comment:** As we were identified with the Lord Jesus in His Crucifixion, so we were identified with Him in His Resurrection. In the former redemptive deed the provision was for cleansing from the power of sin. In the Resurrection our Savior made provision for a "new nature" -- a "new self" (Eph 4:24) so the believer may "live a new life." Through the power of the Resurrection the believer is reborn and possesses the ability to live free from sin in holiness of life. While we will always struggle with sin and weakness we are encouraged to know there is unlimited power to walk with God.

D. The provision of the Holy Spirit.

Rom 8:13 -- For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; **but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.**

**Comment:** One of the main tasks of the Holy Spirit is that of applying the work of the Lord Jesus and thereby bringing glory to Him (John 16:13,14). The Holy Spirit is our Counselor (John 14:24; 15:26; 16:7,12-14) and He dwells in us to lead us into freedom from sin and into a life characterized by His fruit (Gal 5:22,23). As we learn to cooperate with Him He will apply the work of the Crucifixion and Resurrection in our life.

E. The provision of the Word of God.

John 17:17 -- **Sanctify them by the truth;** your word is truth.

1 Pet 1:22 -- Now that **you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth** so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.

**Comment:** There are two aspects to this provision God has made for us. **The first** is that the Bible, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, is in itself a source of holy power (John 6:63; Heb 4:12). When we made a choice of faith to practice the Bible -- that power flows into our life. **The second** is that the Bible has been given to us as a blueprint for life. Through a knowledge of the Scripture we learn how to live above sin and how to practice righteousness. The theme verse for this set of lessons is very appropriate here. We can "grow in grace" (II Peter 3:18).

#### IV. Growing in Understanding the Exhortations Regarding Our "Sinful Nature."

Eph 4:22 -- You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to **put off your old self**, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires;

Eph 4:23 -- to **be made new in the attitude of your minds**;

Eph 4:24 -- and to **put on the new self**, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

**Comment:** The terminology in this passage "put off" and "put on" points to what one would do with "putting on" a garment or "taking" the garment "off." The emphasis is on decision and personal involvement/responsibility. The central exhortation "be made new" has to do with learning what we should do and then putting that into practice.

This passage, one among many (Rom 6:11-22; Gal 5:16-26; Col 3:1-10), emphasizes our daily responsibility. **We are not victims of the Fall nor of what has happened to us in the past.** While we may have to struggle to enter into freedom, due to the error we have been taught along with its bondage, hurts and fears, God has made a provision for us. Our part is to seek help, honestly uncovering the error and bondage, and then to apply the remedy of the grace of God. No believer can do this alone. Because we are members of the body of Christ, and are related to one another as truly as the members of our body, we need the instruction, prayers, love, healing and accountability that only other Christians can bring to us.

**Conclusion:** There are two obstacles every believer must face in learning how to enter into freedom from sin and a life of righteousness. **The first is honesty**, particularly in how things are on the inside. Many times our bondage to sin is with a long-standing problem that produces anger, frustration, and disappointment. It is easy, in such a case, to simply **bury the problem**. That response is very attractive and must be honestly faced and rejected. And, we must be honest about the bondage we have to sin. **The second obstacle has to do with perseverance.** Simply wanting to be free and righteous does not make it so. And, wanting to and working hard does not accomplish the task either. Another element must be added -- knowing what to do and doing it with patience and the support of other believers. These promises and exhortations regarding personal holiness have not been given to us to mock us.

The other lessons in this series will serve to point the way for us as we "grow in grace."