

THE ENEMY WITHIN

Romans 7:14-25

Intro: It seems like we cannot get away from the book of Romans. However, I want to begin tonight to deal with the three enemies of holiness.

You may remember that occasion in Acts 13 when Paul was dealing with the sorcerer, Elymas, who tried to turn Sergius Paulus away from the Gospel. This is what Paul said to him, recorded in Acts 13:10:

O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?

There are three enemies of righteousness, or holiness:

- 1) The flesh within us.
- 2) The devil above us.
- 3) The world around us.

We see all three in Elymas.

He was a part of this world in which we live. He obviously had a sinful heart. He was a "child of the devil" who is the arch-enemy of holiness.

We have recently been through Romans 7, and also concluded not too long ago a series on the latter part of Ephesians 6 where we are told about our warfare with Satan and his forces. But I want to go back to them, and to what the Bible teaches us about world, so that we will see their connection with our need to be holy.

We all know, or should know, that God is sovereign. He can do whatever He chooses to do. Neither men nor angels can withstand His will. And so it is very significant that when we were saved

- 1) the Lord did not take away our capacity for sin, or even the desire (in some instances) to sin.

Nor did He

- 2) remove us to some place, like heaven, where we would be surrounded by all kinds of encouragements to be holy.

If we were in heaven instead of being on earth, it seems that we would make much greater progress. The elect angels certainly would do all that they could to encourage us.

The third thing that we know is that

- 3) the Lord did not cast Satan into the bottomless pit so that he would not be a hindrance, nor did the Lord put us out of the Devil's reach.

The Lord could have helped us in all of these areas, but instead

- 1) We are in this world of sin,
- 2) still capable of sinning, and
- 3) we have the constant threat of an attack from Satan and his forces at any time!

Why has He chosen to leave things the way they are for the present? Obviously this will all be changed eventually.

I doubt if anyone really knows the full answer, and God has not seen fit to tell us all that we would like to know about it in the Word. But we can be sure of one thing: HE HAS DONE IT FOR HIS OWN GLORY.

God has predestined every single one of His people to be conformed to the image of Christ. See Rom. 8:29. For Him to do this (progressively) while His people still have their capacity to sin, and live in a world which "lieth in wickedness," or in the Wicked One (1 John 5:19)--without a single loss--is an undertaking which cannot but bring the greatest possible glory to God, and to Christ, and to the Holy Spirit: the Triune God!

And that is exactly what God has undertaken to do, generation after generation!

Tonight let us look briefly at THE ENEMY WITHIN--that which Paul called in Rom. 7:23b, "the law of sin which is in my members." This is what Paul was speaking about when he wrote of "our old man," or "the body of sin," or simply, "the flesh." It is that old sin nature which still resides within every child of God. This is the reason that we can still sin. This is also the reason why we will respond positively to temptation.

Let us look at this problem in the light of what Paul has written here in Romans 7.

There are four simple truths which I want to point out. I am sure that most of you know them. But I want you see them again now in connection with our study of holiness.

The first is this:

I. PAUL'S DELIGHT IN THE LAW OF GOD.

Note his statement in verse 22. There was a time when he could not have said that, but it was true when he wrote this.

Notice also verse 16. And then look at the first part of verse 14.

He loved the law, the holy law, and more than anything else he wanted to do what the law told him to do. In other words, Paul wanted to be holy!

And what he said about the law could be expanded to all of the Word of God (as his writings show). He loved the Word. He wanted to be like the Word taught him to be. This is

what he delighted in! He would agree with the Psalmist totally with the words we find in Psa. 119:97,

O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.

Undoubtedly the "law" in this verse applies to all of the Word of God. The Psalmist loved it all. And so did Paul. And they wanted to be like God wanted them to be.

Now a question: Is this the way you feel about the Word? Is this the way you feel about being holy? Are you grieved because you are not more holy in your daily life? In the words we had this morning, do you "abhor that which is evil," do you "cleave to that which is good"?

This is a real test as to the genuineness of your salvation. It may not be a perfect delight, but there has to be a delight in the Word and a desire to be holy if you are a true child of God.

But this leads to a second thing which we need to understand:

II. PAUL'S CONFLICT.

He does not say anything here about the Devil.

Nor does he say anything here about the world.

Instead he spoke of a conflict that was going on within him!

He spoke of it as a warfare, and of himself as a prisoner! See verse 23, and notice the difference from verse 22.

See also vv. 15-21.

He obviously was fearful that his desire to please God and to be holy would never be realized!

But out of this he learned three things at least:

- 1) He learned about sin within him.
- 2) He learned that in his old nature there was "no good thing" (v. 18).
- 3) He learned that he did not know how to be holy. See the latter part of v. 18.

As far as Paul was concerned, the greatest obstacle to holiness was the sin that he had in his own heart.

This all leads me to my third point:

III. PAUL'S GREAT DISTRESS.

See verse 24. He called himself "wretched"--

The word lit. means, to bear a callus. The same word is used in Rev. 3:17. It describes the person who has worked and struggled and sought to achieve something, only to fail. It speaks of bitter disappointment. When you see an athlete weeping because he has not won the race, or come out the victor whatever the sport may be, that is wretchedness!

It is the word "misery" in Rom. 3:16. It is translated "be afflicted" in Jas. 4:9. It is translated "miserics" in Jas. 5:1.

Sin always brings wretchedness, but there is no wretchedness like that of the believer who wants to be holy, but does not know how. It will even make you doubt your own salvation.

The picture in Romans 7 is thought to be of a prisoner of war walking through the streets of the enemy, dragging the dead body of a fellow-soldier chained to him. It means disgrace, the greatest of disappointments, wretchedness!

But, thank God, this is not the end! Paul made a marvelous discovery.

IV. PAUL'S DISCOVERY.

What was the answer to his need?

See it in the first part of verse 25: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

You see, we know that we are justified by Jesus Christ. And we know that we can only be glorified by the Lord Jesus. But we need to learn that only Jesus Christ can sanctify us! Only He can make us holy!

Paul's answer was not in himself. Nor was it for him to get rid of his old nature. It was not in some experience. It was in Christ.

Concl: This is not all that can be said, or that needs to be said, but, if we can learn the lessons of this passage, we will have made real progress in the way of holiness. And remember what I said at the beginning: that God has left things the way they are for His own glory. That is seen in Paul's words "I thank God . . ."

Right here in this world, while we are still with and in the flesh, with the Devil walking "about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8b), God can and will make us holy "through Jesus Christ our Lord."

THE ENEMY AROUND US

James 4:4

Intro: Our text states a fact. The world of men is at enmity with God. Thus, every person has to face this fact that you cannot be a friend of God and a friend of the world at the same time. The tragic story of Demas illustrates this. Paul wrote to Timothy,

Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world (age), and is departed . . . (2 Tim. 4:10a).

This brought out, too, by all that God had to say in the OT against idolatry: the world's religions.

Money, which is one of the gods worshipped by the world, also helps us to get a clearer picture. Our Lord said,

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

(Cf. Matt. 6:24.)

Romans, chapter 1, makes it clear that the world hates God. Read Rom. 1:21-23. And notice the expression in verse 30,
" . . . haters of God . . . "

Why does the world hate God?

- Our Lord pointed to the reason in John 15:22-25. In the case of the Father, this had been going on since sin was first committed in the Garden of Eden. God bore testimony against the sins of the world by His judgments, by His servants, and has left a lasting testimony of His displeasure with the world by His written Word.

But we are thinking about holiness. Why does the world oppose us as the people of God in our desire to be holy?

There are several reasons mentioned in the Word of God. Let us consider some of the main reasons.

- I. BECAUSE OF OUR RELATIONSHIP TO JESUS CHRIST. See John 15:20, 21.
- II. BECAUSE OF THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION. Cf. John 15:18, 19.
- III. BECAUSE WE NO LONGER LIVE ACCORDING TO THE WORLD'S STANDARDS.

The past is described in Ephesians 2:1-3.

Our present instructions are to be found in passages like Romans 12:1, 2 and 1 John 2:15-17.

- IV. BECAUSE WE PERSIST IN PREACHING THE GOSPEL.

We do this because we are commanded to do so, but we do it also because we believe that this is the only hope of man. Cf. 1 Cor. 1:18-2:5, 14.

The thing which the people of the world hate the most about the Gospel, as the passage above clearly shows, is that it leaves no room for man to glory!

- V. BECAUSE WE CLAIM TO BE CHILDREN OF GOD (with all that such a claim includes, namely, becoming like God and like Christ).

Cf. 1 John 3:1, 2. Note the expression at the end of verse 1, " . . . therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not," speaking of Christ.

Concl: There is no doubt but that the Christian is in an irreconcilable conflict with the world. The world stands opposed to God, to Christ, to the child of God, and to all holiness.

What is the way of victory? See 1 John 5:4,
For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world:
and this is the victory that overcometh the world,
even our faith.

Faith after salvation as well as at the time of salvation, is a gift from God. It is by faith we stand. Cf. 2 Cor. 1:24b.
— Our faith is our strength from God. Faith means that we believe God and His Word. Faith means that the promises of God and the glory of God mean more to us than all of the ridicule and opposition of men. It is by faith that we come to realize that "the world" is passing away, the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 John 2:17).

Note also Peter's words in 1 Peter 1:14-16,
As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance:
But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;
Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.

Most important of all, see our Lord's words at the end of His Upper Room Discourse: John 16:33,

These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."