

WHAT PAUL KNEW ABOUT HIMSELF

Romans 7:18

Intro: I want you to think with me tonight about Paul's words in Romans chapter 7, verse 18, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh), dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not."

This was a discovery that the Apostle Paul made after he was saved. It was his will to do God's will, but he had found that he did not have the power to follow through with the will of God. His life was marked by failure as far as the will of God was concerned. And it especially had to do with sin. In verse 19 he said, "But the evil which I would not, that I do." And so as He said farther down in the chapter, he was really a "wretched man." He was a miserable man, and it was the greatest of trials to his soul. I think that we can be sure that even before Paul became a Christian, he wanted to live a moral life. But when he became a child of God his ideas about right and wrong underwent a major transformation. Now it was not just the appearance that he was concerned about, but the condition of His heart. And he saw that "good" meant, not just "good" before men, but good before God! That is something altogether different because it has to do with a person's heart, and now just with his outward behavior. God had worked in his heart to give him the will to please God, but he had not yet learned how to do it. He was determined to do the will of God. It was his desire to do it. But he found that it was beyond his ability, and so he was greatly discouraged. The Law which he had formerly taught did not help him at all. In fact, it made matters worse for him.

Now I think that Paul was probably speaking about a period in his life before he understood the truth that he had just written out in chapter 6 of this epistle. And he was answering those who taught what he used to teach, that the answer was in the law, the Mosaic law which was truly the law of God. But knowing what was pleasing to God was different from doing it. And Paul found out that what he had thought at the first was going to bring him the greatest joy and peace, brought nothing but disappointment.

But then it was that the Lord taught him a great and important truth. The problem was not in the law, nor was it in what he wanted to do, actually, was determined to do, but the problem was in himself. Just as he had to

learn that he did not have the power to save himself, so he did not have the power in himself to live a holy life. And it was a point of major transformation in his life when he learned first, that in himself there was not the ability to do the will of God. And the reason: he learned that sin was still dwelling in him, and it exercised a power in his life that he could not handle.

Sin has made man proud, has made him feel self-sufficient, that he can do whatever he sets out to do. And man has done many amazing things on our human level. When a person is having trouble with his life, there are those that say that he does not have enough self-esteem. Our problem is that we have too much self-esteem. When you think about what it is that keeps most people from not believing the Gospel, it is because they feel that they are OK without it. And as I think I mentioned this morning, we all, even Christians, are inclined to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. God never intended that man should live without depending upon Him. And to illustrate this with His disciples, our Lord used the illustration of a vine and the branches, and reminded them that it was just as necessary for them to trust Him, and to draw their life and strength from Him as the branches draw life and strength from the vine. Do we remember our Lord's words in John 15:5 where He said:

5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: **for without me ye can do nothing.**

Note those last words: "For without Me ye can do nothing." Nothing! This means in our relationship with God. We can't do anything without Him. What a blessing it would be in all of our lives if we would remember this as we begin each day! And it would equally bring blessing to our hearts at the end of each day if we would thank God for enabling us to live for Him so that we would not bring reproach upon His holy Name.

I don't know all of the reasons why, when God saved us, He still left our sinful nature within us. But I know, and you probably do too, that it was so we would constantly, throughout lives, always know that we needed Him to deliver us from the wretchedness which Paul experienced early in his life as a child of God.

Salvation in OT times was just the same as it is today since we look back upon the sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Every blood sacrifice that was offered in OT times (and there were uncountable millions of them) looked forward to the sacrifice that put an end to all of those sacri-

fices, the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have blessing now that they did not have, but there has always been, and always will be, only one Savior, the promised Redeemer, the Son of God Who came as Jesus of Nazareth. But in OT times they had the same problem with sin that we do. And that was regretfully demonstrated by one of the godliest men in all of Scripture, whether OT or NT. I am speaking about King David of Israel.

Whenever I read my Bible through I dread coming to 2 Samuel, chapter 11. Do you know why? That is the chapter which tells us of David's sin with Bathsheba. From the roof of his house, the king's house, he could see Bathsheba in her house, and she was bathing herself. She was a very beautiful woman, and he sent for her even after he learned that she was married to one of his most faithful military men. And you know what happened. In several of David's Psalms he mentioned the torment of soul that he went through after committing that sin. And he added sin to sin by having her husband, Uriah the Hittite, put in the front lines of the battle where he would most certainly be killed. And he was killed. I think that story is even more tragic than Judas' betrayal of our Lord because Judas was not a child of God, but David was.

Psalm 51 is the main Psalm in which David confessed his sin. And in confessing it he referred to the fact that he was born a sinner, and he had demonstrated that he still could sin, and did sin. And while there were a lot of people who were affected by his sin, he saw his sin as so much against God that he looked upon it as only against God.

He never sinned like that again, but in a moment of temptation his sinful nature took over, and we have the story in the Bible.

I have often said, and I say it again, that God did not reveal the sins of Abraham, or of Judah, or of Moses, or of Peter, or of anyone else to put even greater shame upon them. But He did it to warn us, to warn all of us that we are not going to be safe from sin until we finally get to heaven. We all are not only weak, but prone to sin. Many sins never get to the public eye, but we can't hide our sins from God.

Now Paul, the former Pharisee, that rising star in Judaism, who had been saved by the direct intervention of the Lord Himself, had been brought to the place even in his life as a Christian where he could honestly say, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh), dwelleth no good thing." It

was a profound discovery for him. What he was saying was that if we were to look at him as he was by birth, without Christ, you would not find a single thing that was pleasing to God, and that salvation did not change that. He, like David, was conceived in sin, a sinner by nature and by birth, utterly unable to move himself one step toward God.

Paul probably had people, even the Lord's people, who, after he was saved, were inclined to stand in awe when they were in his presence because of his achievements before he was saved as a Pharisee and as a rabbi. But Paul would have none of that kind of nonsense because of what he knew, and he knew that by His own experience and he knew it by the Word of God.

Paul looked upon his body, as "the body of this death." He knew he would take it with him until the Lord came, or until the Lord took him home to heaven. And he also knew that there was only one who could take his wretchedness away, and keep it away, and that One was, and still is, "Jesus Christ our Lord." See Romans 7:24.

The Lord has made provision for our victory over sins by His death for us on the Cross. But Paul knew, and so did David, that it also includes a life of daily fellowship with and dependence upon our Savior. Paul told the Colossians, "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him" (Col. 2:6).

Notice that both Romans 7:25 and Col. 2:6 speak of Jesus Christ as Lord.

Concl: Now the big question is, do you know, and do I know, really know, that in us, that is, in our flesh, dwelleth no good thing. There is no reason in us as to why God should have saved us. And really there have been many times in all of our lives when He should not have kept us. What do you and I have to proud of? Nothing! We don't have anything that we didn't receive. We didn't bring anything into the world with us, and we are not going to take anything out. But the day is coming when the Lord will come, and then He will change these vile bodies of our that they may be fashioned like His glorious body, and from that moment on sin will be thing of the past.

In the meantime what do we need to do? First, we need to humble ourselves before the Lord and walk in humility before Him. Second, we need to walk with Him in the light of His Word so that we will be living

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in fellowship with Him! His grace, and His grace alone, will always be sufficient for our every need.