

The Comfort of a Common Struggle

For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.

Romans 7:14

REVIEW

There is comfort in going through something with others, to know that we are not alone and that our experience is not unique. In this text we find many truths and experiences believers hold in common.

I. View of the Law of God – “For we know that the law is spiritual.”

A. Scripture is a painfully revealing mirror (James 1:23). Compare II Ki. 22:8-13.

B. But we agree that its authority, accuracy, indeed its perfection, are not to be questioned. We will not go down the road of blaming God if we do wrong, as if the law *caused* us to sin.

1. See James 1:13-14. Compare:

2. “The foolishness of man perverteth his way: and his heart fretteth against the LORD.” (Prov. 19:3)

3. Eze. 18:25-29 – “The way of the Lord is not equal”!!!

II. Honesty about Ourselves – Paul said, “How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?” and “Sin shall not have dominion over you.” Yet here he is, candid about his own struggles (7:15).

A. This refreshing transparency is found throughout the Bible. See:

1. Gideon's family's decline, where son Abimelech tried to slay his 70 brothers

2. David's numbering of the people and 70,000 died of pestilence

3. John the Baptist's inquiry about Jesus – Matt. 11:2-3

4. Peter's thrice denial of the Lord Jesus during His trial

B. Believers acknowledge we're all *sinner*s – I John 1:6-8.

1. “For in many things we offend all.” (James 3:2)

2. “For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.” (Ecc. 7:20)

III. Humility – “But I am carnal, sold under sin.” “For I know that in me . . . dwelleth no good thing.”

A. “Carnal” – “made of flesh,” fleshly, sensual, as opposed to spiritual.

1. Flesh: the source of sensual passions and propensities – Gal. 5:19-21

2. This text teaches that these corrupt passions still retain a strong, withering, and distressing influence over the mind of a believer.

3. The power of these passions, strengthened by long habit before our conversion, has traveled over into our new life, and they continue still to tempt us.
4. By the way, what an argument this is to:
 - a. Guard innocence – Prov. 4:23, Rom. 16:19
 - b. Starve the flesh; feed the spirit – Gal. 5:16-17, 6:8.

B. “sold under sin” – idea: selling captives of war as slaves

1. See I Kings 21:25 – active voice. Ahab, like Faust, sells his soul to the devil.
2. With Paul – passive voice. An action is done to him. Paul's, and our, selling occurred in Adam. (“In Adam all die.” – I Cor. 15:22)

C. Other examples of humility, for all saints are to be “clothed with humility” (I Pet. 5:5).

1. Abraham – “And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes.” (Gen. 18:27)
2. Jacob – “I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant.” (Gen. 32:10)
3. Moses – “And Moses said unto God, Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?” (Ex. 3:11)
4. Gideon – “And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.” (Judges 6:15)
5. Peter – “Fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” (Luke 5:8)

IV. Struggle for Consistency – “The good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.” (:19)

A. Struggles are part of the reality of renewed but still imperfect souls.

1. Struggles, like those between Jacob and Esau in the womb, between the Canaanites and Israelites in the land, or between the house of Saul and the house of David.
2. Struggles, for we are to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12) and labor to enter into that rest (Heb. 4:11).

B. God's people have always struggled with consistency. Look at

1. Noah – preacher of righteousness for 120 years ... gets drunk, etc.
2. Moses – meekest man on earth, then kept from the Promised Land for his outburst.
3. Elisha – great victory over the priests of Baal, then despairs of life.
4. Peter – preaches salvation for all, yet withdraws from sitting with Gentiles.

V. Hatred of Sin – “what I *hate*, that I do.” (:15b)

A. Now, of what specifically Paul speaks we do not know, but in a sense it does not matter in that we know of what hearts are capable.

B. But we do find here an important point of commonality for us and a mark of a true disciple often overlooked in this age: HATRED of sin.

1. “Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.”
(Rom. 12:9)
2. “Ye that love the LORD, hate evil.” (Ps. 97:10)
3. “I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me.” (Ps. 101:3)

C. Here is why we should have a common stand against worldly music, vile movies, drink, drugs, and law-breaking of all sorts

VI. Delight in the good! – “the law is good” (:12); “I consent unto the Law that it is good” (:16); “in my flesh dwelleth no good thing” (:18); “the good that I would I do not” (:19); “when I would do good, evil is present with me” (:21).

A. As we just read, we are to “Cleave to that which is good” (Rom. 12:9).

1. Love, mercy, justice, kindness, decency, honesty, forgiveness, all that God is and all we want to be – oh, how we confirm the rightness of all that is *good!*

B. And on this, we will not give up. We will never stop pursuing. We will labor to our final breath, to see good triumph.

1. “For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again.” (Prov. 24:16)
2. “Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD shall be a light unto me.” (Micah 7:8)
3. We may be inclined to quit but find we can not. As Jeremiah: “Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.” (Jer. 20:9)

DISCUSSION

1. Our theme is that there is comfort in having beliefs and experiences in common with other believers. Have you discovered this theme in your Christian life? Please give examples.
2. “The foolishness of man perverteth his way: and his heart fretteth against the LORD.” (Prov. 19:3) Explain and illustrate this verse.
3. Would you agree that transparency in the Bible, where even the heroes are revealed to be flawed, is refreshing? Explain.
4. Do you “know,” as does Paul, that in our flesh dwells “no good thing”? Imagine a lost person asks you what you mean by that statement. What would your answer be?
5. Where do you struggle with consistency?
6. Do you hate sin? Explain.
7. Do you delight in the good? Explain.