

GROWING

A Paper for Young Christians

Vol. 8, No. 11

FOUNDATIONS

GETTING THE POWER AND VICTORY OVER SIN IN OUR LIVES (I)

Let us once again look in on Mr. Ronson's Sunday school class:

Mr. Ronson: Do any of you ever struggle with temptation and sin in your lives? (All but one raise their hands.) Beth, would you feel free to tell us about your struggles?

Beth: My mother told me that in order to go to heaven I had to make lots of changes in my life and reach the point where I don't sin any more, and ...

Mr. Ronson: Yes ... and ...

Beth (in tears): And ... it's so hard! I don't think I'll ever make it!

Bill: No, I don't think you will make it, Beth, because none of us can be saved and go to heaven on the basis of our own efforts.

Mary: That's right; the Bible says, "By grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8,9). Also, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us" (Tit. 3:5).

Mr. Ronson: Thank you, Bill and Mary. Does that help you, Beth?

Beth: Yes, and maybe after the class you can tell me more about how to be saved.

Mr. Ronson: Fine, and for those of you who have been saving all your issues of **GROWING**, you should review the Jan97-May97 issues for God's way of salvation. Now Bill, please tell us about your struggles.

Bill: I know that I am saved and have eternal life because I have put my trust in the Lord Jesus Christ (John

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3:16). I owe everything to Him and want to please Him and live for Him in return. But I still give in to temptation sometimes and I still do and say and think things I know are wrong. Is there anything I can do?

Bob (with a slight air of superiority): Bill, why are you concerned about all that. I am saved too and I know I am going to heaven. Remember what Mr. Ronson taught us last month: "Once saved, always saved" (Feb98-Apr98)? Don't you see? Now that we are saved, we can just do as we please and sin all we like and it won't make any difference!

* * *

What do you think, readers of **GROWING**? Is Bob correct in what he says? If not, what can we say to help Bill? How about you? Do you struggle with temptation and sin? Are you trying to get the victory as Bill is, or are you—like Bob—happy to live your life yielding to temptation and wallowing in sin?

Should We Continue in Sin?

The apostle Paul knew people like Bob. In his presentation of the gospel, the apostle shows that the blessings brought to mankind by the obedience and death of Jesus Christ more than overcome the negative effects of Adam's sin: "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20; see Assignment 15). But there were some who took God's grace and ran with it. They asked questions like this: "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" (6:1). The apostle responded by reminding the believers of the meaning of their baptism: "Don't you know that so many of us as were baptized unto Jesus Christ were baptized unto His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by bap-

tism unto death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (6:3,4). Whenever you are tempted to excuse your sin by saying, "I'm only human," or "That's the way God made me," or "I can't help it, I'm just a sinner like everyone else," remember that these excuses are not valid anymore for a real child of God.

Assignment 15: Write out four other verses in Romans 5, besides verse 20, that include the phrase, "much more."

The Meaning of "Born Again"

Have you been born again (John 3:3,7)? Do you know what it means to be "born again"? Yes, you are correct that it means you were lost and now are saved (Acts 16:31); you were spiritually dead and now have eternal life (Eph. 2:2; John 3:16); and you have been born into the family of God as His children (John 1:12). But there is more.

There are three words or expressions in the New Testament that give the truth of new birth. First, "You must be **born again**" (John 3:3,7), or literally, "born from above." Second, "God ... has **begotten us again** unto a living hope ... being **born again** ... by the Word of God" (1 Pet. 1:3,23), or literally, "born upward." Third, "He saved us by the washing of **regeneration**" (Tit. 3:5). The only other use of the word translated "regeneration" in the New Testament is found in Matt. 19:28 where it refers to a whole new order of life. There it refers to Christ's 1,000-year reign of righteousness and peace upon the earth (more about this in a later issue of **GROWING**). So we see that being born again denotes a totally new kind of life. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). So let us not excuse our sin by saying, "This is just the way I am, I can't help it." God has given us the power to live Christ-centered lives.

This goes hand-in-hand with the

teaching of Romans 6 of our identification with Christ in death, burial, and resurrection. Our position now in Christ is "dead to sin" (Rom. 6:2); therefore let us "reckon ourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (6:11).

The Struggle

This all sounds very good, but how do we do it? how do we carry this out in our everyday lives? We want to live our lives on this higher, heavenly plane, in anticipation of being with our Lord and Saviour in heaven for eternity. But ... we keep failing! We sing, "Jesus, keep our feet from falling," and then a few minutes later we fall again.

At this stage, many believers turn to the law for help. By "the law" I don't mean necessarily the Ten Commandments, but any set of rules of living that I am trying to follow. I may try to remind myself of God's justice and judgment in order to keep from breaking His commandments. I may tape the verse, "Be not deceived, God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7) on my wall. I may ask another Christian to check up on me periodically and ask if I have been able to keep from yielding to temptation.

What is the outcome of this turning to the law. Here is how the apostle Paul describes it: "What I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.... The good that I would, I do not; but the evil that I would not, that I do" (Rom. 7:15,19).

(To be continued.) #

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GROWING

A Paper for Young Christians

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FOUNDATIONS

GETTING THE POWER AND VICTORY OVER SIN IN OUR LIVES (II)

The Struggle (Continued)

The Nov00 issue concluded by presenting the struggle described in Romans 7: "The good that I would, I do not; but the evil that I would not, that I do" (7:19). There is no lack of knowledge here of God's Word and God's will. The problem is that the believer described here often behaves and acts and speaks contrary to God's Word and will. And he knows it! He hates it! He cries out, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?" (7:24).

Have any of you, my readers, had such an experience? If so, that's good. Why do I say that? Because it probably means that you are truly born again (Nov00) and possess the new nature (Oct00) since this struggle is between the old and new natures within us. I don't know of any true believer in Christ who has not experienced this struggle.

Issues People Struggle With

With what kinds of behavior, habits, and attitudes do Christians struggle? Let us list a few: Losing one's temper, sexual thoughts and lusts, worry and anxiety, impatience, irritability, pride, gossiping, jealousy and envy, and wasting time (watching TV, playing computer games, surfing the Internet, or reading novels). These are all sins of *commission*. People also struggle with sins of *omission* (Jun96), particularly, failure to share the gospel with those about us, failure to help people in need, failure to reach out to those who are lonely, suffering, or bereaved, and failure to read the Bible

and pray every day.

The Failure of Law

The struggling person cries out, "O wretched man that I am!" He has tried the law and the law has utterly failed to help him, just as it utterly failed to keep the children of Israel following and obeying God. Is this because the law is not broad enough or its penalties not strong enough? No, "the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good" (Rom. 7:12). The problem is that the law does not have any built-in power or motivation to help people to keep it. People who use the law as a rule of life tend to try to find loopholes and to concentrate on keeping their own favorite list of rules, to the neglect of others (Jun98).

The Way to Victory and Power

The wretched man in verse 24, realizing the failure of the law to help him, asks, "Who shall deliver me?" Now the struggler is ready to seek the help of a Person. He is on the right track!

The solution is found at the beginning of chapter 8: "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit—life in Christ Jesus—has made me free from the law of sin and death" (8:1,2). Why is "no condemnation" mentioned here in connection with holy living? Doesn't it belong rather in chapter 3 in connection with the sinner's deliverance from the *penalty* that his sins deserve? I believe it is brought in here as an answer to the believer's struggle in chapter 7. When he sins, the believer who uses the law to get power over sin is condemned by that same law and is self-condemned. God's solution, on the other hand, is one that is totally apart from condemnation (or

judgment) of any kind. The wretched man has asked, "Who shall deliver me?" and here the Holy Spirit answers, "Christ Jesus."

Our Source of power and victory over sin in our daily lives is exactly the same as the One who has delivered us from the penalty that our sins deserved—the Lord Jesus Christ. We must read the Bible daily, growing in our knowledge of Christ and His eternal glories, His humility, His holy life, His obedience unto death, His immense sufferings for our sins, His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension back to the glory, and His coming again for us.

The law of the Spirit, which is life in Christ Jesus, provides the liberating power from the law of sin and death. Up to this point there had been but a single reference to the Holy Spirit in the Epistle to the Romans. Now in chapter 8 there are 16 such references! What is the work of the Holy Spirit? It is ministering the things of Christ to us. He ministers to us Christ's love, joy, peace, longsuffering, etc., and we respond to such ministry by producing the 9-fold fruit of the Spirit in our lives (Mar95). In proportion as we have Christ before our souls, we will find deliverance from sin and power to do God's will in our daily lives.

Just so, when we see our fellow-Christian heading down a path of sin, what should we do? Once we have pointed out his fault to him (Matt. 18:15; Gal. 6:1), we should minister *Christ* to his soul, reminding him of the Cross and all that Christ has suffered for his sake.

Christ Is the Answer!

Let us conclude this topic by simply quoting a number of Scriptures that show us that the power to live holy lives comes from having our hearts set on Christ:

"As I have loved you, you also love one another" (John 13:34).

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you pres-

ent your bodies a living sacrifice..." (Rom. 12:1).

"Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof" (Rom. 13:14).

"Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not Himself" (Rom. 15:2,3).

"We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18).

"For the love of Christ constrains us ... that those who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them and rose again" (2 Cor. 5:14,1).

"Be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you. Be therefore followers of God as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also has loved us, and has given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God" (Eph. 4:31-5:2,25).

"Our Saviour Jesus Christ ... gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Tit. 2:10,12,14).

"Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that does so easily beset us, ... looking unto Jesus ... who ... endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb. 12:1-3). #

Assignment 16: Write out two passages in 1 Peter 2 that appeal to the grace or kindness of Christ and the example of Christ when speaking about Christian behavior.

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