

“Step 4 - It's An Outside Battle”

Romans 7:14-25

If I've given my heart to Christ why do such ugly thoughts still go through my head? You wouldn't think that anyone with Jesus living inside could think these things. It's not that I want to be depressed or think violent, sensual, angry or fearful thoughts. They seem to come from nowhere. Suddenly, there I am thinking or feeling such things and when I realize what's happening I grow angry at myself and frightened. How can something like that still dwell in my heart? Apparently there's still something evil or crazy inside me.

I think all of us have experienced this type of internal conversation. Perverse and tempting thoughts seem to arise out of the hidden recesses of our minds and leave us wondering if that's what we're really like deep down inside. And unless we let God's Word show us the true source of these things and the profound change Jesus has made in us we can be deceived into “owning” impulses that come from the world, the flesh and the devil. And if we buy the lie that those things arise from our own heart we don't stand a chance of becoming free. But Jesus said, “...you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (Jn 8:32).

The old you (Eph 2:1-3)

Paul identifies four major sources that seek to influence every person who is not born-again:

- 1) World: Collective deception and evil patterns of behavior
- 2) Satan (“prince of the power of the air”): Deception, temptation
- 3) Adam's nature (“the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience”): Proud, independence and rebellion
- 4) Flesh: Appetites, weakness

This means we are born into a world in which our parents, friends, teachers, governments and even religions are controlled to one degree or another by ambition, pride, greed, fear and lust. Then when we look inside ourselves we find strong impulses to resist anyone who tells us “no” and decide right from wrong for ourselves. Even our bodies seem to have a mind of their own. Emotions and desires surge through us so constantly they wear us down by their relentless pressure. Whenever we're tired or lonely or discouraged these grow even more intense. They strike in moments when we're too weak to resist. And if all this weren't bad enough, terrible thoughts can enter our minds that seem to come out of nowhere. It's like someone unseen whispered in my ear or was able to project an image onto the screen of my mind. The thoughts themselves disgust me, but more than that they frighten me. I believed I was a better person than that.

This is the situation into which every new baby is born, so it should come as no surprise that in time we all succumb to these forces which are arrayed against us. But God, because He loves us, made a way to escape.

The new you

- “If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness” Romans 8:10
- “Therefore if anyone is in Christ he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold new things have come” 2 Corinthians 5:17
- “I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me...” Galatians 2:20

The key question in all of this is what actually changes when I become born-again, and what does not. What does Paul mean when he says, “new things have come” because I still face most of these enemies and, to be honest, still lose my share of battles against them. What's new and what's not? Let's go down the list of the “old you” and see what's changed:

- 1) World: Do I still live in the midst of collective evil?
- 2) Satan: Is he still allowed to tempt and trouble me?
- 3) Flesh: Have my body appetites all submitted themselves to God's standards? Does it still have a mind of its own?
- 4) Adam's nature: Am I still independent and rebellious toward God?

So, what's changed is that I have by an act of my will (repentance) ended my independence and rebellion toward God. Now I love Him and want Him to help me and guide me. In fact, I want to live to serve Him and not for myself anymore. Yes, the world, the flesh and the devil are still there, but my deep attitudes and relationship with God are entirely changed. And something else has happened. Because I am joined to Jesus Christ, God has come and now dwells inside of me, bringing with Him an unlimited supply of wisdom, goodness and strength far greater than any of the enemies I face.



LIFE LESSONS

WITH DR. STEVE SCHELL

Teaching the Bible
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Body, soul and Spirit

Let's look at the old and new me another way (Ge 1:27; 2:7; 1Th 5:23)

- Body: Dust
- Soul: Breath
- Spirit: Image (a conscious, rational, eternal person with intellect, will and emotions)

Our intellect, will and emotions are what form our basic personality and therefore the essential me, in other words they express my spirit (often called "heart"). It's important to remember that God Himself also has intellect, will and emotions: in fact, we have them because He made us in His image. This means these are spiritual qualities, not by-products of our bodies. We are spiritual beings who live in bodies, eternal persons who begin at conception but then continue to exist forever.

Before I surrendered to Christ every part of me was damaged and getting worse. But when the essential me, my spirit, pressed and helped by the Holy Spirit, chose to repent and believe that spirit became new, no longer rebellious or independent. I am now a loving, obedient child of God. Yet surprisingly, parts of my intellect and emotions still can remain damaged. My intellect (attitudes and patterns of thinking) has areas that need to be renewed by God's Word and His fatherly training. I have to unlearn a number of wrong things and learn to think new ways. And my emotions usually need to be healed too because I still carry wounds from my past. But my will has submitted to Christ so, "He who began a good work in (me) will continue to perform it until the day of Christ Jesus" (Php 1:6).

Conclusion

In future weeks we will talk about ways to deal with those influences we still face from the world, the flesh and the devil, but today we focused on the most important truth of all: that when you and I repent and believe in Jesus Christ our spirit becomes new. We have a whole new nature that hates sin and wants to obey God, so these temptations and impulses that still come are not arising out of the depths of our hearts. They are attacks coming from outside our spirit. Once that realization becomes part of my thinking the devil's important tool of shame is broken. Now I'm able to rise up using God's weapons and fight and win. Let's say it again, "...you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (Jn 8:32).

Questions

- 1) Have you ever doubted your salvation? Without going into personal details, tell us in general terms what brought you to that conclusion.
- 2) How would you explain today's lesson to a child who had received Jesus but had grown angry at himself or herself for having bad feelings "inside"?