

FALSE CONSECRATION

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INTRODUCTION:

This section of Romans is teaching us how to walk in the Spirit, and walking in the Spirit is the only way the Christian life makes sense. If you don't learn how to walk in the Spirit, then your Christian life is going to be an enigma to you and to everyone else, for this is the whole reason we are called to be part of the body of Christ -- that we might learn to walk in the Spirit. This is the process taught us here in Romans 5, 6, 7 & 8.

The problem of walking in the Spirit is not how to *walk* , but how to *keep walking* . It's not hard to tell anyone how to walk in the Spirit. In fact, we have it in the first fourteen verses of Chapter 6 in three very basic, simple steps:

1. **Know** what God says took place on the cross of Christ regarding you and your old man, your old nature, your human life.
2. **Consider** it to be continually true for every day, every hour, and every moment of every day.
3. **Yield** , give over, lean back upon the mighty indwelling life of Jesus Christ who has come to live in you and work through you. Expect him to live *his* life through you and to do it without destroying your personality and without setting aside your activity.

That is the simple process, but the problem is not *how to do it* but *how to keep doing it* .

Have you ever noticed that even a baby, when he learns to walk, has no problem taking the first step? The problem is taking the next ten steps -- it is not how to walk, but how to keep walking. Almost all babies, as soon as they know how to stand, know how to take a step. They do that automatically, naturally. They put one foot in front of the other, take a couple or three uncertain steps across the floor, and then what happens? Well, you know, they look around, or they get worried about what they are doing, or they get engrossed in the process, or something diverts their attention, and down they go.

This is the experience we have so frequently in learning to walk in the Spirit. I think that all Christians have known some brief times, at least, of the joy and the thrill of walking in the Spirit. There are times (not always emotionally felt either) when all of us have sensed God working through us, and much being accomplished, quite apart from us -- this is the experience of walking in the Spirit.

It is like Peter walking on the water after the Lord called to him. Peter said, "If it be thou, bid me come unto thee," {Matt 14:28 KJV}. And the Lord said, "Come," {Matt 14:29}. Without thinking, Peter jumped out of the boat and started to walk across the water to the Lord. About half way across he got excited about the wind and the waves and began wondering how in the world this was talking place anyway, and he became diverted and distracted, and began to sink. The he cried, "Lord, help me!" {cf, Matt 14:30}, and the Lord reached down and picked him up again. This is a beautiful picture of what it means to walk in the Spirit.

Certain Hindrances:

When we begin to walk in the Spirit, there are certain hindrances that come in. This is what Paul is taking up now in these three chapters of Romans.

A Secret Love:

The first of these we have already looked at. We saw that the first hindrance to a walk in the Spirit is a secret love for our sins which makes us unwilling to accept God's verdict upon them. We are reluctant to call things

what he calls them. We don't like the names that God uses about what goes on in our lives. He calls them lying, lust, hate, selfishness, but we prefer our own terms:

- Instead of lying, we say, "It is just a tendency to exaggerate."
- Instead of lust, we say, "We have a hot-blooded nature."
- And we never say we hate somebody, we say, "We have a cordial dislike."
- And instead of selfishness, it is "sensitivity," which we regard as a mark of refinement.

But light demands honesty, and when God the Spirit turns the light upon our lives, we no longer can all pianos "tables," or tables "pianos," we have to call them what they are. "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another," {1 Jn 1:7a RSV}. That is the first hindrance.

False Consecration to the Law:

The second hindrance is what is before us in the last part of the seventh chapter, and the first four verses of Chapter 8. It is what we might call a false consecration to the Law of God.

In the first thirteen verses, that we looked at last week, we saw that the Law has one great effect upon us: It shows us the sinful nature we have in Adam. We learned that it is not only the things we do that are wrong, but behind it, and in back of it, is a tainted spring, a corrupt fountain, that keeps pouring out sin -- a sinful nature. And we also learned that life in Jesus Christ (or Christ living in us) doesn't have any need for the Law at all, no place for it, even though it honors and highly regards the Law.

FALSE CONSECRATION:

Now, that brings us to the last section of the seventh chapter where we see further reason why the Christian must not be under Law. This section presents three things to us. Let me give you the headings so that you may follow me:

Chapter 7:14-20: The Behavior that Baffles,
Chapter 7:21-25: The Law that Limits,
Chapter 8:1-4: The Force that Frees.

The Behavior that Baffles:

In Verses 14-20 we can look at the behavior that baffles. Paul says,

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. So then it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me. {Rom 7:14-20 RSV}

And you say, "My, I didn't know the Apostle Paul knew me so well," for this is a record right out of our own lives, is it not?

This is the struggle that the apostle experiences when he tries, as a Christian, to obey the Law or to do good.

Young Indian's Comments on Law and Grace:

You remember the illustration that I have used on several occasions; it was one of Dr. Ironside's favorite illustrations of law and grace:

It is the story of the young Indian lad who had never been off the Navajo reservation until Dr. Ironside brought

him to Oakland. He had been a Christian only about two years. When he came to Oakland, he was taken into a group of Christian young people one Sunday night when they were discussing law and grace. He listened to them as they argued back and forth about the various aspects, and then the leader called on him to say a few words.

He said something like this: "Me been listening to you talk about law and grace, and the longer me listen, the more me think you don't know what law or grace is."

He said, "Let me tell you what I think: When Mr. Ironside ask me to go to Oakland with him, we get on a big train down in reservation. I never been on a train before, and we ride and ride and ride all day long, and, finally, we come to Barstow out in desert."

And he said, "Me very tired so me get off train to walk platform and stretch legs. While me walk around platform, me see sign that say, 'Do Not Spit Here.' Me look at sign, and me think, 'what strange sign white man put up -- Do Not Spit Here.'"

And then he said, "While me look at sign, before I know what happen, me spit! I look all around platform and I see many people spit here. I think to myself, 'How Strange.' Sign say, 'Do Not Spit Here' but many people spit, and I spit."

And then he said, "We got on train again and come long way, up to Oakland, and some friends meet us at train, and take us to beautiful home. I never been in such home. Mr. Ironside take me in and show me soft chair and excuse himself for awhile, and I left alone in room. I look around and everything is so nice -- soft, thick rug on floor, beautiful walls painted lovely color, pictures hanging on walls -- everything so nice. I walk around room and I think to myself about something, and I look all around room and all over the wall, and I try to find sign that say 'Do Not Spit Here,' but I cannot find sign. I think to myself, 'Too bad all this lovely room going to be ruined by people spitting on floor.' Then I look around on floor, and see nobody been spitting there -- and then it come to me: When the law say, 'Do Not Spit Here' it makes me want to spit, and I spit, and many people spit. But when I come into grace, and everything lovely and nice, I don't want to spit, and I do not need law to say, 'Do Not Spit Here.'"

I think you will agree that, in many ways, this is a wonderful illustration. It certainly is an excellent illustration of what the Law does to us. It arouses our sinful emotions, as Paul says, and makes us want to do what we are told not to do. Who has not experienced this? But, in other ways, the illustration falls short of what grace really does, for it shows, indeed, how the Law stirs up our inward resentment, but it is incomplete in its illustration of grace. For, after we become Christians, we soon discover that, although

- We do have new life in Christ and it is wonderful, and
- We enjoy peace with God, and
- We have access to him, and
- We know that we are in the family of God, and
- We know that we have a certain hope of heaven, and we rejoice in that,

despite all this wonderful atmosphere, *we still want to spit!*

We find that grace hasn't taken this problem away; a desire not to spit is not sufficient. For, even though we may be horrified at the thought of defiling the wonderful room of grace by spitting, the truth is {that} we sometimes catch ourselves spitting anyhow!

A Baffling Experience:

That is what Paul is talking about here in this illustration. The struggle of this passage is expressed for us in Verse 18, the latter part, where Paul says, "I can will what is right, but I cannot do it." Who has not experienced that as a believer in Christ? What a baffling experience this is!

Subtly:

Now, up to this point, we have been learning how subtly the old life leads us into sin in ways we never suspected possible. We have discovered the depths of sin in our life opened up to us by the Holy Spirit that we didn't realize were there. We see the cleverness with which we have been camouflaging, even from ourselves, the hidden perversities within, and the silken subtleties with which we excuse ourselves from these manifestations. But, led by the Spirit, we go from crisis to crisis, confessing each time these newly discovered manifestations of the old nature. Each time we experience release, and victory, until another symptom is called to our attention by the Spirit of God. Then, at last, we seem to come to an end; we rest in the knowledge that we mean to judge every evil symptom that appears. We face up to the fact that it is our harboring of these hidden sins that prevents us from living in victory in Christ, and we realize that the whole thing must go. As we look at ourselves, and come to that place, and, led of God, we say, "By the grace of God, as I see these things brought to my attention, I'll put them where he puts them -- in the place of death -- and these things shall not reign in my life any longer."

Then we have such a sense of cleanness and we feel that the one thing that has been preventing us from victory is doing and thinking wrong, so we have cleared that up, and now we are ready to serve Christ.

Consecration:

Then, perhaps, we go to a consecration service, and we dedicate ourselves to him -- we offer him our time, our talents, and our abilities -- and then we rise up to go out to capture the world for Christ. But, to our amazement, there is no power, there is no effectiveness, no fruit in what we try to do. It is a hard old grind in which we become discouraged and defeated, and, before we know it, some evil that we thought was gone has cropped up again in our life.

Then we go to the Lord, and say, "What's wrong, Lord? I am simply ***trying*** to serve you. I am ***trying*** to do the right thing. Why no power? Why this defeat in my life again?" We know that it is not our hearts that are wrong. We want to do the right thing. We are trying to. As Paul puts it, "it is no longer I that do it."

It is not that I am still clinging to some sin that I am not willing to give up. We are wanting to do the right things, but we still find that sin is around, and it baffles us and mocks us. We think that maybe we made some mistakes, so we try again. We consecrate ourselves again. We resolve again. But it is the same old story: It seems to work for awhile, and then -- ***defeat!***

Carnality:

The most discouraging part of it is to face honestly the name that Paul gives to this position. It is in Verse 14 -- carnality! "I am carnal," it says. In other words, this battle is a description of a carnal Christian.

"Oh," you say, "wait a minute. I thought a carnal Christian was a backslider, one of these fellows who used to go to church, but now watches TV instead of attending prayer meeting on Wednesday night, or maybe the kind who has run off with someone else's wife -- that is a carnal Christian."

Well, you're right. That is one kind of a carnal Christian, but Paul is talking about Sunday School teachers and missionaries, pastors and Christian workers, and good, honest, ordinary, average, sincere Christians who want to do God's will. They have been to consecration meeting after consecration meeting. They have responded over and over to the appeal, "Christ did all this for you, now what will you do for him." They sense the call to commitment, and, in earnestness and utter sincerity, without a vestige of hypocrisy, they say, "Lord, here I am, I give myself to you." They have gone forward backwards and sideways. They have raised their right hand, and their left hand. They would stand on their heads, if it would do any good. They have prayed harder. They have studied harder. They have wept harder. But nothing seems to help, and they are terribly, desperately tired and discouraged!

There are many Christians in this state. Are you there?

The Law that Limits:

Such Christians have one thing left to learn. They are still subject to the law of sin and death, as Paul points out, in the law that limits, Verses 21-25:

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. {Rom 7:21-25 RSV}

Here Paul is analyzing this baffling condition of defeat:

The Law of Temptation:

The first thing he says is, "I discover that the law of temptation is still present with me. I find it to be a law that, when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. That is, every desire on my part to do right is met by an equal urge to do wrong."

This is the law of temptation, and there is nothing alarming about it. I think many Christians make a serious mistake here because they feel that they should expect to be delivered from temptation, from any sense to do wrong. But Paul simply faces the fact that this is a law.

Satan is still around to allure us, and, through the flesh, try to tempt us and trap us -- even the Lord Jesus did not escape this -- he was subject to temptation just as we are.

Temptation is a necessary part of the process of learning how to refuse evil and choose good. So it is always there, but it is not the problem.

The Flesh is Unable:

The second discovery the apostle makes is that, though my desires are right, the will is redeemed and set right, and the heart is purified, yet the flesh is not able to respond to the demands that the will makes upon it: My best efforts cannot please God! We learn that the flesh is not only sinful, but helpless -- it is totally incapable of pleasing God.

For many Christians, it is shocking to learn that sin is not only ***doing*** something wrong, but that it is also ***trying to do something right in our own effort***. That is sin. That is part of the old nature as well. This is what Paul discovered.

Now, this is a secret that God has gone to great lengths to teach his people throughout the ages.

Peter:

This is what our Lord was referring to when he spoke to Peter in the Garden of Gethsemane, as he retired into the deeper shadows of the garden to pray. He said to Peter and the others, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation," {Matt 26:41 KJV}. That is, ask God to keep you from being tempted now, because, if you are tempted, you will discover that the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak! Peter ignored that warning, and slept instead of praying. He boldly tried, in utter sincerity, with the best of motives, and with complete consecration of heart and mind, to serve the Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane.

You know the story of how he ended up baffled, and broken, and weeping over his blasphemy and denial -- a living picture of what we have here in Romans 7:

Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? {Rom 7:24 RSV}

Jacob:

This is the secret that Jacob learned, as recorded in Genesis 32:24-32, when, at the brook of Peniel, he struggled to get God to bless him.

This is a picture of the way we struggle. We make our plans and programs, and work everything out, and say, "Now, Lord, bless this." And so frequently, nothing happens, and there is no blessing on it.

Jacob was doing that. He was struggling with God, trying to get him to bless him, until God finally put his thigh out of joint, in order that he might learn to cling in helplessness to the only one who could be his strength.

Abraham:

That is what Abraham learned after the birth of Ishmael, when he had the promise that God would give him a son who would be the heir of all the promises that God had given him. The years went by and nothing seemed to be happening, and Abraham couldn't wait any longer, and, in complete sincerity, with the best of motives, and with the deepest desire to do God's will, he tried to help God fulfill his will. He took an Egyptian girl for his wife and almost destroyed his home in the process. It wasn't until thirteen years later that he began to see that God not only has a will, but he also has his own way of performing that will.

Moses:

This is what Moses learned when he tried to deliver Israel after he graduated from the University of Egypt. He stood there on the steps, with his diploma in his hand, trained in all the knowledge of the Egyptians, with all that he felt qualified to be used of God to be the deliverer of Israel. He knew that he had been called to that from his birth, because his mother had told him the stories of his birth, and he set out to do the work that God had called him to do. Within 48 hours he had become a murderer instead of a missionary, and he had to flee from the face of Pharaoh {see Exod 2:11-15}.

Paul:

This is what Paul learned after he had been three years in Arabia, praying through the Scriptures and learning anew how Jesus Christ is in all the Scriptures. He came back to Damascus and went into the synagogues with confidence that his background as a Pharisee, raised in the traditions of Israel, would give him access to these people. He thought he could be God's instrument to deliver Israel and bring them back to Christ. He went in and began confidently to preach Christ in the synagogues, but they wouldn't listen to him. Then, one night, his friends had to take him out and let him down over a wall in a basket, like a common criminal.

Paul wrote to the Corinthian church later and said he gloried in this experience, because then he began to learn how helpless he was in himself, and all that he was, all that he had, all his training and ability were nothing. "God can take me just as I am, a mere man, and use me" -- this is what he concluded.

And you remember how he went up to Jerusalem, and there, broken and defeated, the Christians shunning him and having nothing to do with him, he knelt in the temple and the Lord appeared to him, and said, "Get thee out of Jerusalem and go home -- back to Tarsus," {cf, Acts 22:18 KJV}. And for seven years Paul waited in Tarsus till he learned the secret that all his training and ability made him **highly qualified to be utterly useless**. At last he discovered this secret that the flesh can do nothing to please God.

Andrew Murray:

Andrew Murray writes:

God works to will and He is ready to do, but, alas, many Christians misunderstand this. They think that, because they have the will, it is enough, and that, now, they are able to do. This is not so. The new will is a permanent gift and attribute of the new nature, but the power to do is not a permanent gift, but must be

received each moment from the Holy Spirit. It is the man who is conscious of his own impotence as a believer who will learn that by the Holy Spirit he can lead a holy life.

All this is really just the struggle of the old nature to obey some law, whether it is the Ten Commandments or some other law. We hear sometimes how God uses a man, and we say, "Why doesn't God use me that way?" And we put ourselves under the 'law' of someone else, and try to do the same thing, but it never seems to work.

An Autobiographical Word:

I remember my own experience, if I may just share an autobiographical word with you:

When I graduated from seminary, I thought that the power needed for a ministry lay in the man of God -- so I studied men. I followed them. I saw men that were being used of God, and I said, "What is it that is the secret of their power?"

When I thought I found it, I tried to imitate it, and to adapt it to myself. I caught myself aping men -- talking like them.

Some of you will remember how, coming fresh from the influence of the ministry of Dr. J. Vernon McGee, I used to talk like him. I wore bright red shirts, because I thought that was the hiding of his power. I finally realized that the power did not lie in the man.

Then I thought the power lay in the message: It must be what men say that is so moving and powerful and potent. So I listened to men, and read books, and when I ran across a passage that I felt would beautifully state some truth, I would almost memorize it -- so that I could repeat it.

When I had a message that was particularly blessed of God, I'd say, "Well, that worked. I'll put that one aside, and the next time I am invited to speak at a conference or some special place, I'll bring that one out. That is the one that will do the trick." I would go to the conference, and, in all confidence, I would bring the message out and preach it -- and it would fall flat! I would go to the Lord, and say, "What's wrong? I am simply trying to do what is the right thing. Here is a message that you blessed before. What is wrong?"

At last, baffled and defeated, I learned the lesson that power does not reside in the *man* or the *message*. "Power belongeth unto God" {Psa 62:11 KJV}, and God never gives it to anyone. He will live it through men, but he never gives it to anyone: Power belongs to God.

'Do-It-Yourself' Christianity:

Paul sums up this whole picture in Verse 25:

Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. {Rom 7:25 RSV}

That is, I know there is deliverance in Christ -- thanks be to God for that -- but I have found that as long as I, of myself, serve the Law of God with my redeemed will, then I will also, by inevitable law, serve with the flesh the law of sin and death. In other words, *'Do It Yourself Christianity' Never Works!*

The Force That Frees:

Now we are ready for a look at the force that frees, in Chapter 8, Verses 1-4:

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the

just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. {Rom 8:1-4 RSV}

We have come to the full noontide of the gospel. When we come to the end of ourselves, both in *not doing evil* and in *trying to do good*, then we are ready to rest upon the work of Another to do everything through us that needs to be done. We are no longer responding to the love motive; that is, "Christ did something for me, therefore I must do something for him." But, now, we are acting from the life motive. The only commitment that will hold up, you see, is that which springs from our reliance upon his life in us.

No Condemnation:

The first word to us here is, "there is no condemnation." Blessed words!

When you discover your inability to serve God by much zeal, and much prayer, and much study, and you waken to your frustrations and your bafflement -- then you are tempted to quit being a Christian. You say, "Oh, Lord, what's the use? I have tried, and tried, and tried, and I get nowhere. Why try any more?" Your heart condemns you, and you feel terrible.

It is right at this point that John says, "if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, for he knoweth all things," {1 Jn 3:20 KJV}. Though we are self-condemned, God doesn't condemn us. He knows that there is a struggle, and he is not surprised or alarmed. It doesn't shock him as it does us, because he expected nothing but failure all the time! He knows the flesh; he knows it can't do anything, and he's not surprised.

Sometimes, even though we are very disturbed, the greatest moment in our life is when we come to God, and say, "Lord, I quit! I cannot do it." God says, "Good! That is what I have been waiting for. Now I'll do it." And, without a word of reproach or rebuke for our failure, he does through us what we struggled in vain to do -- that is "the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus."

The Indwelling Life of Christ:

Notice what he says: What neither the Ten Commandments, nor any other law, could ever accomplish, what no standard of perfection that we are trying to follow could ever do, because of our weak, sinful, unable flesh, is now fully accomplished in us by another principle: The indwelling life of Jesus Christ, ministered to us continually by the Spirit to do everything that life demands of us, fulfilling the Law, and more. However, the law of sin and barrenness still persists. It is still present, and ready to spring into action whenever we harbor sin or try to serve Christ by our own will or ability.

We will discover this to be so, and that is why Paul puts this struggle in the present tense. But when we abide in Christ, as he abides in us, and we recognize that for everything we do, whether it is

- Tying our shoe,
- Washing the dishes,
- Preaching a message,
- Typing a letter, or
- Whatever it is --

for everything we do, we must rely in total dependence upon the law of the Spirit of life in us; then that law takes over and cancels out the law of sin and death. What we could not do by our own effort, we do through him.

The Law of Lens Correction:

I discovered when I was about 18 years of age that I had in my members a law that was operating, called the law of myopia (or nearsightedness), which made my eyes unable to see what other people with normal eyesight could see. I struggled against that thing and tried to ignore it, and to squint and endeavor to see anyway, but I couldn't. The harder I tried, it seemed, the worse it got, until, at last, I learned of another law --

the law of lens correction. A couple of years ago I had an eye doctor insert a tiny plastic lens into each of my eyes (contact lenses, they call them), and, now, without any effort on my part, the law of lens correction operates to cancel out the law of myopia -- so that I can see with better than normal vision. All I need to do is to be sure that the lenses are in my eyes. I put them in every morning, then, all through the day, I don't have to think about them any more. They are continually operating to correct my sight, and the law of lens correction sets me free from the law of myopia!

So too, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus sets me free from the law of sin and death!

The Exchanged Life:

This is the exchanged life, the released life. It is a continual paradox. Life in the Spirit is a life of restful activity, and this is a paradox. It isn't simply sitting around waiting for orders from God. It is facing life with all its mystery and fascination,

- With a continual recognition of, and
- Constant praise and thanksgiving for

the fact that, within, is the indwelling life of Christ, ready to do instantly, through me, all that I need to do. As I rest upon it, I find that I can simply go ahead doing the normal, the natural, the obvious, and, in it and through it all, God is at work! Life becomes a continual matter of the expectation of miracles, of excitement, because of what God does through me -- and yet it is rest without struggle.

Witnessing:

This is particularly evident in witnessing:

I used to be so concerned about to whom I should witness; I would pray that God would lead me to the one that he had prepared, and would try to talk to everyone that I met, if I could.

Then I discovered that, many times, I was doing more harm than good -- that I was driving people away from the gospel. I would make them uncomfortable, and they would avoid me, and, as a result, would be much harder to reach because of my efforts.

At last, I learned to rest upon the indwelling life of Christ, and now, when I get aboard a train or a plane, I look for the obvious -- the most comfortable seat. I now expect God to lead me to the one he wants me to reach. I talk to the one that sits down next to me in a normal conversation, and, if something seems to develop a little bit, I follow it through -- if it doesn't, I don't worry about it.

It may be the man that I will meet at the water cooler is the one, or it may be that the Lord just wants me to enjoy a friendly conversation about the Dodgers and the Giants with this man.

This is normal life, you see. Yet, I have had more opportunity for effective witness this way than ever before.

Captive Liberty:

This is not only a life of restful activity, it is a life of captive liberty. That is a paradox too.

In other words, everything is right unless I know it is wrong, because it is the job of the Holy Spirit to let me know that something is wrong -- and he does! I feel the check, if I am honest with him. Then I can walk in liberty continually. If I am dishonest, or if I refuse to listen, then I am plunged right back into the same old futile struggle which is here described, in Romans 7. But if I walk in honesty before the Lord, I find that everything is right unless I know it is wrong. I can do *all* things. The legalist turns that around; he says, "Everything is wrong unless I know it is right." But Christ gives us a life of liberty in the Spirit.

Power-filled Weakness:

It is also a life of power-filled weakness. "We have this treasure in earthen vessels," Paul says, "that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us," {2 Cor 4:7 KJV}. Sometimes we are very much aware of the vessel; we get tired, feel weak, have a scratchy throat, or sore muscles. The weakness of the vessel is evident. But we have a treasure within that, even in the midst of infirmities, is able to manifest itself. This is why the apostle could say, "I glory in my infirmities, because when I am weak, then I know that the power of Christ rests upon me," {cf, 2 Cor 12:9-10 KJV}. So it is a life of power-filled weakness.

Joyful Suffering:

Then, it is a life of joyful suffering.

I have told you before that this is the mark of a Christian life lived in the fullness of the Spirit -- rejoicing in suffering. Paul points this out in Chapter 5.

In 1900, when the Boxer Rebellion broke out in China, it seemed as though all the work of the China Inland Mission would be destroyed. Every day new reports would come of pastors beheaded, or missionaries captured. Hudson Taylor was then an old man, and his co-workers feared that his health might break under the pressure of continual bad news. One day, when a particularly distressing bit of news had come in, the office workers went up to Hudson Taylor's home to see how he was taking it. They feared for what they might find, but, as they drew near, they heard the old man singing. As they listened, they heard him sing:

Jesus, I am resting, resting,
In the joy of what thou art.
I am finding out the greatness
Of thy loving heart.

Thou hast bade me gaze upon thee,
And thy beauty fills my soul,
For by thy transforming power
Thou hast made me whole.

Yes, this is a life of victory over suffering, strength over weakness. in the presence of weakness.

This is the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

Prayer:

Our Father, we thank you for this truth. You have said that we shall know the truth and the truth shall set us free. Father, you know that the flesh resents this exposure of the phony nature of its righteousness. We don't like to be told that we cannot do things for you, but we thank you, Lord, that if we are willing to believe you, and lay hold of this, that very self-mortification crucifixion brings us to the place of resurrection, and we rejoice in life in the Spirit. May this be our experience, in Christ's name. Amen.

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