

Struggling With Sin

Message 5 of 6 in the series: "Romans: Christianity 101"

A. In AD 57, Paul wrote a lengthy "Christianity 101" letter to Christians living in the wicked city of ancient Rome to help them grow strong in the Lord.

"This letter is from Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, chosen by God to be an apostle and sent out to preach his Good News... I am writing to all of you in Rome who are **loved by God and are called to be his own holy people**... I long to visit you so I can bring you some spiritual gift that will **help you grow strong in the Lord.**" Romans 1:1, 7a, & 11 (NLT)

So far in his letter, Paul has unpacked the Good News that:

1. Through faith in Jesus, not trying harder, undeserving sinners have been made right with God and saved from the penalty of sin. "For no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are. But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. **We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ.** And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. For **everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins.** For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood." Romans 3:20-25a (NLT)
2. When we surrendered our lives to Jesus, our old sinful selves died, and we were set free from slavery to sin. "Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace? Of course not! Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it? Or have you forgotten that when we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined him in his death? For **we died and were buried with Christ by baptism.** And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, **now we also may live new lives.** Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised to life as he was. **We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin.**"

Romans 6:1-6 (NLT)

IMPORTANT! We have not been set free from the ability to sin, but from the controlling power of sin. "For when we died with Christ **we were set free from the power of sin**... Don't you realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey? You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God, which leads to righteous living. Thank God! Once you were slaves of sin, but now you wholeheartedly obey this teaching we have given you." Romans 6:7 & 16-17 (NLT)

IMPORTANT! Being born again happens in a moment. Becoming like Jesus is a life-long process. "I have fought the good fight, **I have finished the race**, and I have remained faithful." 2 Timothy 4:7 (NLT)

B. Now we can serve God, not by hopelessly trying to keep religious rules, but by living in the power of the Holy Spirit.

1. We are under no obligation to try to earn right standing with God. "Now, dear brothers and sisters—you who are familiar with the law—don't you know that the law applies only while a person is living? For example, when a woman marries, the law binds her to her husband as long as he is alive. But if he dies, the laws of marriage no longer apply to her. So, while her husband is alive, she would be committing adultery if she married another man. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law and does not commit adultery when she remarries. So, my dear brothers and sisters, **this is the point: You died to the power of the law when you died with Christ. And now you are united with the one who was raised from the dead.** As a result, we can produce a harvest of good deeds for God. When we were controlled by our old nature, sinful desires were at work within us, and the law aroused these evil desires that produced a harvest of sinful deeds, resulting in death. But now we have been released from the law, for we died to it and are no longer captive to its power. **Now we can serve God, not in the old way of obeying the letter of the law, but in the new way of living in the Spirit.**" Romans 7:1-6 (NLT)

IMPORTANT! "For God is working in you, **giving you the desire and the power** to do what pleases him." Philippians 2:13 (NLT)

WARNING! Although Jesus has set us free for joyful obedience, we can still be tricked into legalism. “You have died with Christ, and he has set you free from the spiritual powers of this world. So why do you keep on following the rules of the world, such as, ‘Don’t handle! Don’t taste! Don’t touch!’? Such rules are mere human teachings about things that deteriorate as we use them. **These rules may seem wise** because they require strong devotion, pious self-denial, and severe bodily discipline. **But they provide no help in conquering a person’s evil desires.**” Colossians 2:20-23 (NLT)

2. Sadly, because of our rebellious sinful nature, the commands of the law actually provoke us to sin. “Well then, am I suggesting that the law of God is sinful? Of course not! In fact, it was the law that showed me my sin. I would never have known that coveting is wrong if the law had not said, ‘You must not covet.’ But sin used this command to arouse all kinds of covetous desires within me! If there were no law, sin would not have that power. At one time I lived without understanding the law. But when I learned the command not to covet, for instance, the power of sin came to life, and I died. So, I discovered that the law’s commands, which were supposed to bring life, brought spiritual death instead. **Sin took advantage of those commands and deceived me; it used the commands to kill me.** But still, the law itself is holy, and its commands are holy and right and good. But how can that be? Did the law, which is good, cause my death? Of course not! Sin used what was good to bring about my condemnation to death. So **we can see how terrible sin really is. It uses God’s good commands for its own evil purposes.**” Romans 7:7-13 (NLT)
3. Because we live in a fallen, sinful world; because we are constantly being tempted by the devil; because our fallen, sinful bodies crave sinful pleasures; and because we have old sinful habit patterns and ways of thinking, we will struggle with sin until the Lord takes us home. “So the trouble is not with the law, for it is spiritual and good. The trouble is with me, for I am all too human, a slave to sin. **I don’t really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don’t do it. Instead, I do what I hate.** But if I know that what I am doing is wrong, this shows that I agree that the law is good. So I am not the one doing wrong; **it is sin living in me that does it.** And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can’t. I want to do what is good, but I don’t. I don’t want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. But if I do what I don’t want to do, I am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it. I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love God’s law with all my heart. But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. **Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord.**” Romans 7:14-25a (NLT)

IMPORTANT! We gain victory over sin by surrendering control of every part of our lives to the Holy Spirit, NOT by willpower. “So I say, **let the Holy Spirit guide your lives.** Then you won’t be doing what your sinful nature craves. The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. **These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions.** But when you are directed by the Spirit, you are not under obligation to the law of Moses. When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God. But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things! Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. **Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit’s leading in every part of our lives.**”

Galatians 5:16-25 (NLT)

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Connect Group Questions:

1. Read Romans 6:1-6 & 7:1-6. Why are Christians under no obligation to try to earn right standing with God by keeping religious rules like the followers of all the other religions in the world?
2. Why do you think being born again happens in a moment but becoming like Jesus is a life-long process? (2 Timothy 4:6-7)

3. Read Romans 7:7-13 & Jeremiah 17:9. Why do you think a “Wet Paint, Do Not Touch” sign makes us want to do exactly the opposite?
4. Read Romans 7:14-25. How does it make you feel to hear that the Apostle Paul, who wrote most of the New Testament, struggled with sin in his life just like the rest of us?
5. Read Colossians 2:20 & Galatians 5:16-25. Then discuss the following chart:

Legalism	New Life in the Spirit	License
Focus is on what we do	Focus is on who we’re becoming	Focus is on what we want
We must try harder to manage sin in our lives.	We must surrender control of every part of our lives to the Holy Spirit.	We can run up the tab on God’s grace.
Results in pride or despair	Results in Christ-likeness	Results in debauchery & destruction

6. Discuss the following verses:

“My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Galatians 2:20 (NLT)

“Is there a conflict, then, between God’s law and God’s promises? Absolutely not! If the law could give us new life, we could be made right with God by obeying it. But the Scriptures declare that we are all prisoners of sin, so we receive God’s promise of freedom only by believing in Jesus Christ.”

Galatians 3:21-22 (NLT)