“The Only Alternative That Works”

August 5, 2018

Galatians 5:14-23

Please find with me the seventh chapter of Romans.

I’d like to begin with a story; a true story. It’s a story about three teenagers. And I’ve changed their names. But this is a true story. It was summer and a very humid summer. So the boys decided they’d go swimming in the nearby lake. But something frightful happened. Now, you need to know this about the three boys. One of them, Bob, was a very good swimmer. His friend Jack was a mediocre swimmer. But the other friend, Leon had only been swimming once or twice and had almost no understanding on how to swim.

And here’s what happened. Leon, the least capable swimmer of the group, somehow swam out away from the shore when he got a muscle cramp in his leg. And, as you probably know, you can get a muscle cramp when you’re dehydrated and you overexert you muscles; usually a leg muscle. And, of course, the best thing to do if you get a cramp when you’re swimming is to get out of the water; then stretch and massage your leg.

In this case, Jack (remember he’s a mediocre swimmer), noticed Leon was struggling and struggling and struggling to keep his head above water. And since Jack was not a strong swimmer, and realizing he couldn’t do much to help his friend Leon, naturally, Jack began shouting to Bob for help. Now, Bob was an exceptionally good swimmer.

And yet Bob, who easily heard Jack hollering, did nothing; which somewhat startled Jack who could see that Leon was really drowning. “Can’t you see he’s drowning?” hollered Jack. And yet Bob didn’t move. He could certainly see Leon from where he was in the water; but simply refused to go. Jack could see no reason for why Bob was so reluctant to swim over and save his friend, who by now was calling out “Help, help, I’m drowning.” Now Jack knew that he wasn’t a strong enough swimmer to help Leon and if he didn’t get help soon, in seconds he’d be gone. And Jack began screaming at Bob because he was doing nothing to help Leon.

But something amazing happened that day; something Jack says he’ll never forget. Bob, at the very moment when he saw that Leon had stopped struggling and was about to go down, with just a few strokes Bob was at his side and in seconds had a grateful Leon safely on shore.

Then, when he was sure Leon was OK, Jack couldn’t hold his thoughts any longer. “Why in the world didn’t you go after him when I called? Why did you wait? Why’d you wait so long?” Bob, an excellent and experienced swimmer, knew exactly what he was doing. “Jack, had I gone after him any earlier, he was panicking and would have grabbed me with all his strength and it’s very likely both of us would have gone under. You can’t save a drowning man until he is utterly exhausted and can’t do a thing to save himself.” [Found on <http://articles.ochristian.com> “The Meaning and Value of Romans Seven” by Watchman Nee].

I tell you that story because, spiritually speaking, that appears to be the essence of this seventh chapter of Romans.

Some Christians never seem to make any spiritual progress. Why? Here’s why. They believe that the key to spiritual success is their own effort. They think that applying more and more spiritual muscle to live the Christian life will enable them to succeed. They believe doing more and more is the answer. And when things get difficult, they double down and push themselves to do quote “spiritual” things.

And rather than give up their independence, rather than stop depending upon themselves, they struggle because they think their flesh can please God. And they fail a lot. Yet, they’re sincere and they really do want to please the LORD. So, they try harder only to find time after time, they can’t. I know. I’ve been there.

Folks, we aren’t all that different from each other. We’re learners. I’m a learner. Spiritually speaking, I’ve been just where Leon was until Bob swam after him and rescued him. I’ve tried to quote “do more for the LORD.” I’ve tried to do a lot of quote “Christian activities,” pray more, witness more, work harder, etc. because I believed that that’s what I needed to do. But, the LORD really is a Patient Teacher. He waited until I was tired of my own efforts and surrendered to Him. And I’m learning only now that my spiritual walk and growth depends not on me, but on Him.

Jesus says this in John’s Gospel. John 6:63 *“It is the Spirit that quickeneth [makes alive];* ***the flesh profiteth nothing****: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.”*

And in John 15:5 we hear Jesus saying this *“I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.”*

So God, in His Patience and Wisdom, (He’s got all the time in the world) waits until you finally come to end of yourself. Then He intervenes. Then He delivers. Then He rescues. And then, the Christian life begins to work for them.

Now, it might just be you in that place today. If so, Romans seven will be your “light at the end of the tunnel” and you will come to the end of your struggle. Romans seven shows you that the only alternative that works is letting Christ live *His* life through you.

I’ve titled today’s message “The Only Alternative That Works.” Shall we pray?

What is Romans seven anyway? Romans seven is Paul’s explanation of his own words in chapter six, verse fourteen, where Paul says this about the Law, sin, and God’s grace. Romans 6:14 *“For sin shall not have dominion [rule] over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. (15) What then? Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid [May God never allow it].”*

God means for you to know and see that sin does not have dominion over you anymore. You are not under the Law. Instead, you are under His grace; free and all sufficient grace.

*“Grace means that God does something for me; law means that I do something for God. God has certain holy and righteous demands which He places upon me: that is law. Now if law means that God requires something of me for their fulfilment, then deliverance from law means that He no longer requires*

*that from me, but Himself provides it. Law implies that God requires me to do something for Him; deliverance from law implies that He exempts me from doing it, and that* ***in grace He does it Himself****.”* (W. Nee)

Here’s what the whole seventh chapter looks like.

First, Romans 7:1-3 Marriage illustrates the power and dominion of the Law.

Second, Romans 7:4-6 Christians are dead to the Law.

Third, Romans 7:7-12 If the Law gives us so much difficulty in the matter of sin, then why did God gave us the Law?

And fourth, Romans 7:13-25 “If I do what I shouldn’t do, doesn’t that mean I’m still under the Law?”

Today, Romans 7:13. Please follow with me in your own Bible. Romans 7:13 *“Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful. (14) For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.*

*(15) For that which I do I allow [understand] not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. (16) If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. (17) Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.*

*(18) For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform [do] that which is good I find not. (19) For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.*

*(20) Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. (21) I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. (22) For I delight in the law of God after the inward man:*

*(23) But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. (24) O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”*

The LORD is right now working on your inner man. And when I read Romans seven, I know that God was working on Paul’s inner man; verse twenty-two.

Romans 7:22 *“For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: …”*

Christian, the Holy Spirit wants you to see and under-stand that sin dwells in you. The law of sin in in the members of your body. And yet, you have a delight in God’s law. And what does Paul say? Only the LORD Jesus can deliver you from the body of this death. Sin dwells. You delight. And He delivers.

So, the only alternative that works is to give up your struggle and let the LORD Jesus Christ take full charge of your life.

First, at some point in your life as a Christian, you will have to grapple with the fact that sin dwells in you. We know that God is good. We also know that everything that He says is good. And we know that everything He does is good; verse 13. Romans 7:13 *“Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.”*

That which is good is the Law, God’s law; God’s commands. Now, do you think God gave us His Law so we’d keep it or so that *we’d* see that we couldn’t keep it? Listen carefully. The Law always makes demands on you that you cannot keep. Now, the Law is good. The Law is spiritual. The Law is just. And the Law is holy. But, and here’s the rub. The law is also weak. In other words, when it comes to your pleasing the LORD and fulfilling His commands, it can’t be done.

Go back with me to the very beginning of the world. In Adam’s world, God and His Word were good and holy and just and spiritual. Then later, when Moses came along and received the Ten Commandments, these commands also were good, and holy, and just and spiritual. Yet, God did not intend that His Law could make you obey Him.

Instead, through His Law comes the knowledge of your personal sin. Romans 3:20 *“Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.”*

Let me say it like this. The Law was like the old-fashioned school-master. In days gone by, all the children in a family were overseen by a very strict and stern disciplinarian known as a schoolmaster. This schoolmaster, authorized by the father, maintained strict discipline so that each child would learn to distinguish right from wrong. And every time the child disobeyed, the tutor would discipline him or her. In time, he’d see what was right and what was wrong.

In both the Greek and the Hebrew world, when a child grew out of his need for a nurse’s care and was old enough to quote “go to school,” his father put him or her under a charge of a pedagogue or schoolmaster. And the main responsibility of the pedagogue was to oversee and to supervise all the character development of the child, not necessary an educator who imparted knowledge.

Think about God’s Law as very strict and stern school-master. He was good and just and holy and spiritual in all of his dealings with the child. Yet, the child only suffered because there was no way he could keep all the rules the schoolmaster laid on him.

Now, is it possible that this was good for the child? Listen with me to the Holy Spirit in Paul. Galatians 3:24 *“Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster [pedagogue] to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified [made righteous] by faith. (25) But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.”*

It’s really important to see why God gave us the Law. Do you see why? “Here’s why God gave us His Law. It was intended that each you and I discover that in and of our-selves we could never please Him. We need an alternative that would work. We need something, actually Someone, Someone living within us that would enable us.”

And as you are about to see, the only alternative that works is for God Himself to come to live within you. And when that is the case, He can and He will obey His own law through you. He’s the One Who enables you to live a righteous life. The only alternative works by faith.

The purpose for the schoolmaster, the purpose for His Law, was to bring you to the place where you see you have a need for Christ. It’s that simple. The law was weak in this sense. It could not bring us into compliance. Only the Son of God living within you can enable you to do what you know you should do.

Folks, we’ve all learned that outward conformity to rules is not what the LORD is after. He wants you to want to do right. And how can that happen? He puts a Divine Want-to within you. Then the Holy Spirit within you gives you *His* power to do it.

So, first, every Christian had to grapple with the fact of indwelling sin.

Second, sin may dwell in your flesh. But you have a new nature.

This is the only alternative that works; verse fourteen. Romans 7:14 *“For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. (15) For that which I do I allow [understand] not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. (16) If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. (17) Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.*

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Here is possibly the most amazing thing that can happen to a human being. II Corinthians 5:17 *“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature [creation]: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”* A Christian has a new nature. Your old man, your old sin nature was crucified with Christ. So, now, as a Christian, when you sin, you need to see things as they really are. Twice Paul says this here. Romans 7:17 *“Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.”*

Romans 7:20*“Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.”*

I’m learning, just like you, that, when I receive and believe what the LORD says about me, I accept it simply because *He* says it; not because I have a full understanding of it.

Now, I need to go back for just a moment to the sixth chapter.

Romans 6:3 *“Know ye not [don’t you* ***understand]*** *that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death?”*

Don’t you understand, says the Holy Spirit, that at the moment of your salvation God moved you out from the realm of the dominion (the rule) of sin and He also moved you into the realm of the Lordship of Christ. You were baptized (immersed) into Christ’s death.

And look with me at Romans 6:6.

Romans 6:6 *“Knowing [****Realizing]*** *this, that our old man was crucified with Him that the body of sin might be destroyed [rendered inoperative] that henceforth we should not serve sin.”*

Folks, God said it. Believe it. You and every Christian everywhere in the world have been baptized into a Person, which means then, that what happened to Him has also happened to me. He died and I am in Him. So, I died there as well. I have been crucified along with Christ, which means that my old man, my sin nature was crucified.

Paul puts it like this in Galatians 2:20 *“I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live. Yet, not I, but Christ lives in me. And I the life I now life in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me.”*

Here’s a chorus that is well worth learning. It’s “I Am Crucified With Christ” It’s by John G. Elliott and it’s titled “I Am Crucified With Christ.” It’s in our hymnal, number 558. I’ll sing it first and then you join me the second time around.

If you sin today it’s because sin still dwells in your flesh. But, in your spirit, in your mind, in your heart you now know that you belong to God and He wants to have full charge over you. So, because you are no longer under the dominion of sin, stop letting the sin that dwells in you take over.

You see, Christian, you have a new relationship with God. And you also have a new nature in Christ. So, your new world is this. Today and every day (even every hour) you can present yourself to God as His servant. Today you can present the members of your body to God for His service. Today you can serve Him with your spirit. You can serve Him whole-heartedly. Today, it’s not just try harder and do more for God.

Before you came to Christ, you could *not* do this. But, now, with a new nature within you, you can. Now, with the Holy Spirit living within your spirit, you can.

Folks, there are two great facts of history that make all the difference in your life today. God didn’t just take care of your *sins* at the Cross. He also took care of your *sin nature*. What happened to Christ at the Cross is exactly what happened to you.

And, yes, a Christian does sin. But it’s not because you have a sin nature. It’s because you have sin dwelling in your flesh. Your old man, your sin nature, has been crucified.

Romans 6:6 *“Knowing [****Realizing]*** *this, that our old man was crucified with Him that the body of sin might be destroyed [rendered inoperative] that henceforth we should not serve sin.”*

Listen, folks, if your sin nature has been crucified with Christ, then what happened at the moment you were saved is this. He gave you a new nature. You are a new creation in Christ. God is not calling you to focus on what *you* can or *you* can’t do. He wants you to focus on *Him*, on what *He* can do and what *He* wants to do. He’s given you a new nature. You have the nature of Christ living with in you.

Here’s how one write puts it. “It is not simply that he (the Christian) receives something new but that he becomes someone new...The new nature is not added to the old nature but replaces it. The transformed person is a completely new `I.'

You have but one nature, the new nature in Christ. The old self dies and the new self lives; they do not coexist. It is not a remaining old nature but the remaining garment of sinful flesh that causes Christians to sin.

The Christian is a single new person, a totally new creation. The believer … has *residing* sin but no longer *reigning* sin. He is no longer the old man *corrupted* but is now the new man *created* in righteousness and holiness.” (*The MacArthur New Testament Commentary - EPHESIANS*, p. 164)

And so you are a servant of the Most High God. Romans 6:16 *“Know ye not [don’t you see], that to whom ye yield [present] yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?”*

Did you ever wonder how it is that you could love the LORD with your whole heart and soul and mind and strength? Who or what can change you on the inside?

Folks, you are already changed. Something beyond wonderful has happened to you. And daily, the LORD is changing you more and more into the image of His Own Son. He’s bringing out what He brought in to you on the day you were saved.

So, yes, sin dwells within your flesh. But Christ has made you His own. You are a new creation. You have a new nature. You have become a partaker of the divine nature. You are not what you once were. Hallelujah!

1. Every Christian had to grapple with the fact of indwelling sin.
2. You have a new nature.

This, as you can see, is the only alternative that works.

Most Christians are trying to be the best Christian they can be. But, God is not asking you to be the best you can be. He’s calling you to complete surrender so that you say to Him, “LORD, I can’t. Please take full control of my heart and mind.” Or you can also say “LORD, I can. Please take full control of my heart and mind.”

I began with a true story about three teenagers swimming in a lake. I want to end with that same story. You see, until you come to the place where you are willing to let Christ has His way with you, you will struggle and struggle and struggle some more. The LORD wants you to live by Someone Else’s strength, the power of Christ living within you. He’s sent His Spirit to indwell you. So, you are never alone. And you only need to see yourself as you truly are to find all your resources in Christ.

The key to living is this. Who am I presenting myself to? Am I presenting myself to the sin which resides in my flesh? Or, am I presenting myself to the LORD for obedience to Him? Jesus says He is the Vine and you are one of His branches.

Paul said this in chapter six. Romans 6:16 *“Know ye not [****don’t you see****], that to whom ye yield [present] yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?”*

Now, you, His living branch, must choose. You will live by His grace? Will you let Him be LORD of everything or will you continue to struggle by wondering if you are lord? Just like Paul it will be struggle on your own or be delivered by Christ Himself. Which will it be?

Shall we pray?

Will you let Him have His way today?

Hymn # 321 “When I Survey”