

# **Bible Studies for Life for October 19: All Christians struggle with sin**

October 6, 2008

Before salvation, we have one mind and one spirit. That spirit is sin. By the world's standards, we may be good people, but the guiding principle for our lives is a sinful one. We live for our own glory, according to our own wishes. As a result, we are at peace with ourselves and in enmity with God.

After salvation, a second Spirit is introduced, and we begin a state of war with ourselves. The Holy Spirit begins his work on our hearts, trying to change us into God's image, but the sin spirit continues its reign in our hearts. It is a battle we must actively engage in.

Unfortunately, failure to engage in the battle against sin is roughly equivalent to fighting for the sin nature. God never forces himself on us, and unless we specifically invite him to change us and strive to live out those changes, we will continue to act in our sin nature.

Paul says it well in Romans 7:18-19: "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing."

## **The fact of sin is not license to sin**

I've heard Christians use this passage as an excuse for their continued sin. But Paul isn't offering us a comfy blanket to make us feel better about ourselves. Nor is he giving us license to sin. He is merely summing up the Christian experience. We are not to rest in our sin. We are to rest in the

power of God to rescue us from that sin.

We like to talk about salvation as a one-time event. And yes, it is in one sense. At the moment we believe in the gift of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, we are born into God's kingdom. But just as physical birth begins a process of growth as we develop into mature men and women, salvation begins a lifetime of spiritual growth as we develop into mature believers. As Paul says in Philippians 2:12, we are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

### **Resisting sin requires attention**

Overcoming sin demands effort, but not human effort. It's a work of the Holy Spirit, and we'll talk more about that next week. But it isn't the Holy Spirit working alone. Rather, we work with him, allowing him access to our hearts and minds.

Overcoming the sin nature is by necessity a joint effort—us working with God—because sin begins its work in our mind. That's where temptation begins. That's where our attitudes are formed. And our mind is fed by our heart's desires. So where does the battle against sin begin? Ultimately, it begins in the heart. Unless we have a heart for God, we are helpless against sin.

You've probably heard the story of the Native American who described his own inner struggles. "Inside of me there are two dogs. The black dog is mean. The white dog is good. Every day the black dog fights the white dog." When asked which dog usually won, he answered, "The one I feed the most."

While the sin nature reigns in our flesh, it doesn't have to win. With the power of the Holy Spirit, we can have victory over sin. Remember the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

gentleness and self-control. Paul tells us, “Against such things there is no law” (Galatians 5:22-23). So while sin is exposed by the law, the fruit of the Spirit are above the law. They are more powerful than sin or the law. But to access this power, we must feed God’s Spirit in ourselves and starve the sin nature.

### **Feeding God’s Spirit**

The only way to access God’s power is through faith. It sounds too simple to be effective, but Jesus tells us we can move a mountain if we have enough faith. Victory over sin requires self-discipline that can only be found in God through faith.

How do we develop this faith? Through knowledge. When we are secure in the knowledge that God is who he says he is, that he loves us and has our best interest at heart, we can begin to turn over control to him.

That’s why Peter says: “Make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins” (2 Peter 1:5-9).

We must know God in order to strengthen our faith in him. But we aren’t looking for head knowledge. We can know about God without knowing him personally.

James 2:19 says: “You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.” We must get to know God personally. That means we must spend time with him. We must read his word and pray. And we must ask him to help us know him better—not as the world knows

him, but personally, as a Father to a child.

Then, with a more intimate knowledge of God, we can know how to obey him. When faced with temptation, we will know his heart. And we can ask him to give us strength to obey him even when it hurts.

That strength is ready for the asking. All we have to do is believe. "But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one ... . May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance" (2 Thessalonians 3:3, 5).

### **Discussion questions**

- *Is there an area of your life in which you can't gain victory over sin?*
- Are you trying to overcome it in your own strength? Or have you asked God to help you overcome? Or both?
- What could you do to increase your faith in God's ability to rescue you from that sin?