



Daily Devotionals – July 3 to July 9, 2021

By Dr. Charles Qualls and Rev. Steve Gibson -- Franklin Baptist Church

July 3 - Romans 7:7-20 by Rev. Steven R. Gibson *The Law and Sin*

7 What then should we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." 8 But sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law sin lies dead. 9 I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived 10 and I died, and the very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. 11 For sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. 12 So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good.

13 Did what is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, working death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.

The Inner Conflict

14 For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin. 15 I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. 16 Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. 17 But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. 18 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. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. 20 Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

Devotion:

The duality of the law and sin have been almost inseparable for millennia. Sin is sin because the law defines it that way. So we have a chicken and egg question -- what came first, the chicken or the egg?

Paul spends considerable time in Romans seeking to clarify this question. Without the law, sin has no description or definition. A person could sin, but they would not be aware of sin if the law had not defined sin. The law was an imperfect vessel trying to convey God's commands. In essence, the law was the channel not only for the knowledge about sin but also for the knowledge of sin. So the law brings to us the understanding that the law is holy (v12) and yet the law defines what is sin.

To put it another way, the law, which came from God, is holy, and the flesh is in slavery to sin. Christians innately understand what God requires, and most of the time we really try to comply, but our flesh complicates things. This is indicative in verse 15, "For I do not do what I want, but do the very thing I hate".

The purpose of God giving the law was to draw sin into one place, a place where sin could be dealt with once and for all. Although Paul gets to the heart of the problem in v17, the problem of sin dwelling in a person. This indwelling of sin is perhaps a precursor to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (which will be discussed in the next Chapter). Paul was serving as an example to the remainder of us -- if Paul, a person of impeccable spiritual maturity struggles with the indwelling of sin, then you and I are in good company. We accomplish doing the will of God by being filled with God's Spirit. Likewise sin occurs when our flesh wins out.

So, what are our takeaways from this passage?

- The law was given by God to define sin.
- Sin is a part of the human condition.
- Christians struggle with consistently doing the right thing.
- The law allows for sin to be placed in a single area where God deals with it once and for all.
- We need to replace the indwelling of sin with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.
- God's desire for fellowship with us is a powerful motivating force.
- Our inner conflict remains, but God is faithful

I close this devotion with a tough question -- are our doubts an indication of a weak faith?

Prayer:

We praise you, O God, for showing us what sin looks like. We also praise you for providing a way out of sin. May our lives reflect our speech. Amen.

July 4th - Psalm 145:8-14

by Dr. Charles Qualls

The Lord is Good to All

8 The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. 9 The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.

10 All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord, and all your faithful shall bless you. 11 They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and tell of your power, 12 to make known to all people your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations. The Lord is faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds. 14 The Lord upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down.

Devotion:

Today is the Fourth of July. A national day of celebration, for we remember our independence that was hard won. We tend to relax on this day unless we are hosting our entire family group or friends. Then, we are spiffing up and getting ready to cook. Hopefully, we also find ourselves with a moment or three of gratitude for the freedoms that remain uniquely ours as Americans.

I hope this day is a relaxing one for you. I pray that, even if for a brief moment in all of the unrest that could be ours in this strange season, you will find encouragement on this day. A sense of hope that emerges from our national story that is larger than our own. Our history instills an overarching picture of hard work, creativity and determination.

What's more, I pray that today's psalm will guide your spiritual sense of thanks that should be greater yet than our national fervor. For the Lord is Lord of all kingdoms, including our own. The Lord's own works are to rise up and give thanks for all that God has done.

As most of you know, we lost my father this past week. Mine was the privilege to sit with him in the night as he passed. At times, I held his hand. I monitored his breathing. I watched as that slowed, and was still watching as life itself drained from his eyes. Soon, he was gone. His graveside service was on Sunday afternoon.

I have drawn deeply from my spiritual and personal reserves and found that the Lord is good to all. I have found that God's compassion was still over us as we most needed it. While we were bowed down under the weight and sorrow, the Lord upheld us. The loving expressions from so many could be nothing less than the Lord's holding us up while we were yet falling.

God has dominion over you and me. God has rule over my lifetime and over yours. God also oversees our nation as God does all nations. Let all who have eyes to see and ears to hear know that the Lord reigns over any government or nation. God transcends any time, place and issue. In good times and in challenging, the Lord of all times rules. For those who will live as God would have them to, God's love and compassion stands by to uphold. For those who will bow to God, God will strengthen and honor their goodness.

Prayer:

Lord, on this day may we sense your power and compassion on us. Not because of anything we or our nation are capable of, but because you love us. May our actions and our decisions honor you always. May you refine us when they don't. Amen.

July 5 - Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

by Dr. Charles Qualls

Come to Me

11:16 "But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another, 17 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.'

18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon'; 19 the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."

25 At that time Jesus said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; 26 yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. 27 All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

28 "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Devotion:

We have always struggled to understand Jesus. We may love him. We may hear the great stories of our faith. We may memorize the inspirational verses and take heed of the guiding quotes. But knowing and understanding our Lord remains an elusive realm for many. Ultimately, none of us comprehend all there is to grasp.

I suspect that John the Baptist was an Essene, although not all scholars believe so. His isolated location, his dress and diet all point in that direction for me. He proclaimed the nearness of God's kingdom and called all who would to repent. Then, Jesus' turn came. He, too, was misunderstood and accused of being less than holy.

Truth is, maybe some folks like me can trust in Jesus more easily than the super intelligent. Humanity can think themselves right out of faith in Christ. Remember the apostle Paul's reference to "...the folly of the Cross"? In the end, Jesus extends a simple invitation.

"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

You all get to worship in our beautiful Sanctuary. You get to stare up at the compelling image of Christ in our stained-glass. It's right there, the dominating feature in our room. I have to turn and look away from you in order to have the same view. I do so sparingly. However, I do get an easier view of the inscription that is a part of it. You just read it in the quote here.

In these days of fresh grief, I find this passage today so inviting. The thought of a powerful God who is also able to provide a place of rest is comforting. A God who will not save me from my suffering, but who can help me carry the load, is all I need.

Prayer:

God of grace and Lord of power, grant that we may try to understand you better. Help us to come away from our presumptions of you. Lead us to lay down our biases, that we may see you for who you truly are. Amen.

July 6 - Song of Songs 2:8-13

by Dr. Charles Qualls

My beloved!

8 Listen! My beloved! Look! Here he comes, leaping across the mountains, bounding over the hills.

9 My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Look! There he stands behind our wall, gazing through the windows, peering through the lattice.

10 My beloved spoke and said to me, "Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, come with me. 11 See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone. 12 Flowers appear on the earth; the season of singing has come, the cooing of doves is heard in our land.

13 The fig tree forms its early fruit; the blossoming vines spread their fragrance. Arise, come, my darling; my beautiful one, come with me."

Devotion:

One of my favorite seminary professors played a hilarious joke on one of my closest friends. Thankfully, I didn't volunteer as quickly as my eager friend. "I want to read something for you all. Would someone loan me your Bible?" Our class met in the largest lecture hall the school had. The two of us sat in the front row. Eighty students in a packed room watched as my friend Don graciously extended his arm.

Dr. David Garland reached out and took Don's Bible. He began to leaf through its pages and stopped. He looked up and said, "Hmmm....Song of Solomon. Everyone's Bible falls open first to what they read the most." The entire room broke into raucous laughter! As it turned out of course, the pages hadn't actually fallen open to Song of Solomon. Dr. Garland had sold the joke perfectly, though.

"Song of Songs," better known as Song of Solomon in our Old Testament, is regarded with nearly as much fascination as John's Revelation. Except that we don't study or preach much from it since everyone is convinced that it is about romantic love. If read in that light, this book is downright racy! What if that's not actually the way it was intended to be understood?

What if, instead of romantic or sexual love being expressed, we understood Song of Solomon to be a metaphoric expression of God's love for humanity? Israel in particular, but humanity in general. What if its writer employed the use of a symbolic, expressive love as a larger parable? This symbolism expresses God's keen affection and dedication to us. That is exactly what a growing body of biblical scholars believe.

You might re-read today's scripture just now. Perhaps these words speak of God's promise and hope in the same way the prophets always included an optimistic note. Life's ebb and flow is much like the seasons of agricultural growth. Humanity's history includes ups and downs, challenges and good times. God's love is unchanging. God's presence is unwavering.

Prayer:

May the God whose love for us is so profound be met with an equal love from us. Lord, continue your patient waiting for us to actively and demonstrably love you as you have already loved us. Amen.

July 7 - Psalm 131
by Dr. Charles Qualls
Song of Quiet Trust

1 O Lord, my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me.

2 But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; my soul is like the weaned child that is with me.

3 O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time on and forevermore.

Devotion:

Most of our faith is lived not on the mountaintop, nor with the fanfare like in the blast of the trumpet. But instead, most of our faith is lived in the quiet moments of surprise and insight. God speaks more often, it seems, in the whisper of a dove than in a deafening shout.

This psalm is labeled a "song of quiet trust." Doesn't that sound like something you might relate to? This is not the excited faith of a new convert. This is not the overcooked rambling of one who is trying to imitate another person he has watched or heard at church. This is not the charismatic, revved up voice of the pied-piper or "dynamic" Christian everyone thinks is "on fire for Jesus."

This is a more mature voice than all of that.

This person has lived a little. They have seen a lot probably. They have tried on silly faith and found that in this moment of their life a more honest, organic expression to God fits the bill. In a world of "sprinters," they are a marathoner instead when it comes to their encounters with the Divine. They are honest, straight-forward and are speaking plain-talk to a God who most desires that. It is striking that they are not (at least for now) trying to ring up God like a cosmic Santa Claus with hopes for a bag of toys. In fact, their deepest need is for all of Israel to journey with them. To see their people collectively place their hope in God again, evidently in contrast to that which has held their trust for a time.

We could do well to read this scripture passage slowly. With a quiet, mature spirit. And then just listen.

Prayer:

God of Israel and of all Creation, incline your ear. Listen for our honest voices. Beckon us collectively, as a people, that we might hear your voice and recognize it as our Lord. Amen.

July 8 - John 13:1-17

by Rev. Steven R. Gibson

Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet

13 Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ²The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper ³Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. ⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" ⁷Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." ⁸Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." ⁹Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" ¹⁰Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." ¹¹For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

¹²After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? ¹³You call me Teacher and Lord -- and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. ¹⁷If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

Devotion:

Many scholars divide John's Gospel into two sections: Chapters 1-12 focus on Jesus' teachings and miracles (often referred to as the Book of Signs) while Chapters 13-21 serve as the Book of Glory.

Coleman A. Baker states that verse one introduces the second half of the Gospel by including several themes including Passover, Jesus' hour, Jesus' knowledge, Jesus' return to his Father and Jesus' love for his disciples. Hence the Book of Signs is replaced by the Book of Glory. The first part introduced Jesus as a teacher and worker of miracles while the second part focuses on Jesus' coming departure from the world to return to the Father. Jesus loved his disciples until the end.

There is some discrepancy here -- was Jesus speaking of loving the disciples until the end of his earthly life, or was he speaking of loving them completely? Many scholars believe that both possibilities are correct. Immediately following the phrase, "he loved them to the end," Jesus speaks about the devil infiltrating the heart of Judas Iscariot to betray him. Jesus went about the normal supper routines, knowing full well that his path to the cross was set before him. Then Jesus confounded them with his actions by taking off his outer robe and tying a towel around his waist and prepared the basin with water to wash the disciple's feet and dry them with the towel. Of course, Simon Peter would take exception to this action by Jesus, vowing first to never allow Jesus to wash his feet, and suddenly reversing course by asking Jesus to wash not only his feet but also his hands and head. Following this encounter, Jesus gave his disciples a pop quiz -- do you understand what I have done to you? Finally, Jesus reminds them that the servant is not greater than their Master.

This is a lot to unpack, but let's give it a try. Kathleen Long Bostrom has the following to say about this series of events. "How wonderful it is to have one's feet washed, after all those feet have been through. Because the foot washing comes at an unexpected time, the disciples know immediately that this is something out of the ordinary. The action of washing the disciples' feet is a remarkable act of tenderness at a point in time when the disciples need a little TLC. Like the woman who anoints and washes Jesus' feet, Jesus pauses at the cusp of his own anguish and tends to his flock. They will not soon forget what he does for them on that dark night."

Just like Jesus, we are called to tender acts of servanthood, in which we focus on one person at a time and give them our full attention. Think about that for a moment -- to give individual attention to each disciple is

powerful. Jesus knelt at the feet of each disciple and washed their feet. Was there dialogue? Maybe. If there was dialogue, what were the contents? Maybe a word was exchanged reflecting that person's significance in Jesus' life. Even if no words were spoken, the symbolic act of Jesus, our Master stooping to wash his disciples' feet would have spoken volumes to them and to us today. While washing their feet, Jesus acknowledged how the men had walked with him and also the path that they were being asked to walk in the days ahead. Of course Jesus knew that all would not always remain true to him, but nevertheless he loved them.

Our Lord used the smelly, dirty feet of his disciples to display the depths of his love for them. Jesus pampered their feet, treated them with loving care and readied them for the journey ahead. Only one pair of feet was preparing to be pierced with nails, for us.

This beautiful scene reminds us that our service to others, in Jesus name, is what God requires of us. This beautiful scene is the background for our deacon ordination service when the newly ordained deacon is given a towel with the following inscription: Every Member A Minister with the date of ordination on the line below. This beautiful scene reminds us of Matthew 25: 34-40:

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸ And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹ And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' ⁴⁰ And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, you believe in us, just as you believed in your disciples. Guide our feet that we may serve you. Amen.

July 9 - Exodus 3:1-6
by Rev. Steven R. Gibson
Moses at the Burning Bush

3 Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. ³ Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." ⁴ When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." ⁵ Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Devotion:

This was no ordinary day in the life of Moses because we have a transition from being a shepherd to a messenger of God. The first clue that this was not business as usual begins in verse 2 in which Moses encounters a flaming bush. What was different was that this bush was not being consumed, plus an angel (messenger) addresses him. Two supernatural occurrences in the same verse!

This narrative also includes God's own voice and that voice speaks to Moses. This passage reveals God's first presence in the Exodus story and there is much to glean from its contents.

It is instructive to note that God's presence appears in two parts -- the burning bush and the angel or messenger from God. The burning bush fascinates us because it does not conform to human understanding,

but isn't it interesting that the angel does not speak. Following this is when the Lord spoke to Moses and the burning bush does not seem to matter as much, only hearing the voice of God.

The burning bush and the messenger were sent to grab Moses' attention so that he would listen to God's voice. God's speech contains three elements: The summons, the reality of God's holiness, and the revealing of God's identity.

When Moses is summoned, he responds with "Here am I," which indicates his willingness to submit and obey. This is Moses' first theological encounter with God and this would shape the remainder of Moses' life. Second, the voice calling out from the burning bush is *holy*. This encounter with God changes everything including the conversation and the place of the conversation. God's holiness is so great that Moses has to take off his sandals because he is on holy ground.

How does Moses respond? Moses, afraid, turns and hides his face because he was afraid to look at God. Moses did not look at God because for him to see God would invade upon God's holiness.

Several thoughts and questions leap off this section of scripture.

- How does the Lord grab our attention today?
- Would we recognize the voice of the Lord?
- If we recognized the voice of the Lord, would we obey the voice of the Lord?
- Are there places in our lives that are holy?
- What are the places in our lives that are holy?

I close with a remarkable text from Suzanne Lord entitled "Do you know your Shepherd's voice?"

Do you know your Shepherd's voice?
Are you listening with your heart?
Have you stopped to hear him calling, find the peace his words impart?
As the world shouts its orders that are easiest to hear,
won't you draw away and listen to your Shepherd standing near?
Are you listening to your Shepherd?

Prayer:

Lord God, thank you for speaking to us. May we hear your words as our loving shepherd and respond in love to your voice. Amen.