

Overcoming Sin

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen's sermon emphasizes the struggle against both conscious and unconscious sin, highlighting the importance of spiritual growth and reliance on the Holy Spirit for victory in Christ.

Duration: 15:01

Scripture: Romans 7:14

Topics: "Overcoming Sin", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

Zac Poonen explores Romans 7:14-25, emphasizing the struggle between conscious and unconscious sin in the believer's life. He highlights Paul's experience of wanting to do good but often falling into un-Christ-like behavior due to the sinful nature that dwells within. Poonen explains that while believers can achieve victory over conscious sin, there remains a deeper layer of unconscious sin that God reveals progressively as one grows spiritually. He encourages believers to recognize that this struggle is a part of the Christian journey and that there is no condemnation for those in Christ, as they continue to strive for Christ-likeness. Ultimately, Poonen reassures that through Jesus, believers can find hope and the strength to overcome sin.

Transcript

We want to look a little more closely at Romans chapter 7 verse 14 to 25 to see some deeper truths concerning overcoming sin and the life of victory that we can find here in this passage. The Bible speaks about conscious sin and unconscious sin and we need to think a little bit about that because we will understand Paul's experience here when we see that. In 1 Corinthians and chapter 4, Paul gives us his testimony saying in 1 Corinthians 4 verse 4, I am conscious of nothing against myself but I'm not by this acquitted for the one who examines me is the Lord.

And so we see here Paul saying that even though he's not conscious of any sin that he's committing consciously, yet there's unconscious sin in him that the Lord sees which he doesn't yet see. So Romans chapter 7 verse 14 to 25, there are two pictures here. One is where I don't want to sin but I accidentally fall in a moment of weakness.

That's one aspect of truth that comes through that we've already considered. But there is another and that is what we see in Romans 7 verse 15. That which I'm doing I do not understand.

Now that's a key to this passage. That's another aspect of the truth concerning freedom from sin here. That even though sin does not have dominion over me, I have victory over conscious sin, yet there because my flesh, as it says in Romans 7 verse 14, my flesh is sold into bondage to sin.

I'm not sold into bondage to sin, but I have a flesh that is sold into bondage to sin. And because of that, there are things in me that I'm not even aware of. Unconscious sin.

Romans 7 verse 15, that which I'm doing I do not understand. So that's the other aspect that's also brought out in Romans 7 verse 14 to 25. And there he says, I'm not practicing what I would like to do, but I'm doing the very thing I hate.

What is it I like to do? I want to behave like Christ and speak like Christ and think like Christ and do everything like the Lord Jesus Christ in every area of my life. But I'm not able to do that. Because I find in certain situations I get light later on that I acted selfishly there.

Or I sought a little honor somewhere. These are inward sins. We're not talking about, you know, that accidental falling into anger or the accidental lusting which we mentioned earlier in our study of this passage.

But here's sins of the spirit, deeper things like, I realized after doing something to the best of my ability, oh, I was seeking a little honor there from somebody. I did that to impress someone. Lord, I don't want to do it.

I'm not wanting to do it, but I'm practicing what I don't like to do. Now it says here, verse 16, if I do the very thing I do not wish to do, I agree with the law, it's good. The law wants, I mean, God's will is that I must be perfect like Christ in everything.

But I haven't got there yet. So now, then what is it that's making me do that? Though with my conscious mind I'm really seeking to serve God, there's a sin that indwells me in my flesh that's making me unconsciously do certain things that are un-Christlike. So how shall we be free from this? In my flesh, verse 18, there dwells nothing good.

My flesh is never going to change. The wishing is present with me. My wishing is that I become like Christ totally in every area.

But in actual practice, I find I'm not behaving like Christ or doing what Christ would do in different situations of life, or thinking like Christ would think, or having the same attitude to money and women and other people and things exactly like Christ. I want it, but the good that I wish, I want to be like that, I find in different situations I'm not like that. And as I progress in the Christian life, as I grow in the Christian life, the Holy Spirit gives me light on different areas of my life, which at one time I didn't understand.

Like we said in verse 15, that which I'm doing I do not understand. We can look at our life something like this, like a cube of ice in a glass of orange juice. Ninety percent of it is under the surface of that orange juice and you can't see it.

And ten percent is above. So our conscious life is like that ten percent above which we can see. And there, Romans 6 14 applies, we can get victory.

If we are faithful, we can overcome sin in all our conscious area. But still, there's a ninety percent of our life which is unconscious, where we just don't have light and we are doing a whole lot of un-Christ like

things. This is what John expresses in 1 John.

See, John says two things. In 1 John chapter 3 and verse 9, he says, no one who is born of God practices sin. He does not continue to commit sin because he's freed from it.

If he comes to a life of victory, he does not commit conscious sin continuously. He may have the occasional fall, but that's different from continuously committing sin. That's also what we looked at in Romans 7. But John says another thing in 1 John 1:8. If we say that we have no sin, now, having sin is different from committing sin.

Committing sin is a conscious thing, some area we are aware of. It's wrong to lose my temper. It's wrong to lust after a woman.

And yet, in the moment of weakness, we may suddenly find you have done it, even though you hate it. It's not something that you're doing all the time, but you hate it, and you suddenly realize after you slipped up, that was an impure look, or that was anger, or that was a word spoken in anger, and you repent of it immediately. But having sin is something which I'm not even aware of yet.

See, lusting and anger and things like that, we are aware. But having sin is areas of un-Christ-likeness in our life, which we're not even aware of. We have it.

See, if you think of that cube of ice that I mentioned, if you could neatly slice off that top ten percent, that would be like having victory over conscious sin. What would happen? A little bit of that underneath ninety percent would come up, and you would get light on it. So that's how it is.

As we walk with the Lord, God gives us light on things in our life which we didn't have light on earlier. Maybe you're too talkative. Maybe you're not talking evil things, but maybe you dominate a conversation, so that you don't give other people time to talk.

And you're always talking spiritual things, but dominating the conversation. And you don't see that that is un-Christ-like. And one day you suddenly get light on it, and you say, hey, I dominate the conversation so much, when I'm sitting with other people.

And I didn't have light on it till now. Lord, thank you. A little bit of that ice cube has come up.

And as you deal with that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, God gives you a little more light on what is underneath. That is Christian progress, and that ice cube becomes less and less and less and less, as we grow spiritually. So now coming back to Romans 7, this is the other aspect of sin, unconscious sin now, which we saw in 1 Corinthians 4. I'm conscious of nothing, but I'm not acquitted, because there's still many un-Christ-like attitudes and habits and thoughts in me.

So now, applying that, we understand this passage a little better. I'm doing the thing which I don't wish to do. I want to be perfectly Christ-like, but I'm not doing it.

Why is it then? It's because the sin that dwells in me, there's a flesh in me in which dwells nothing good. So the wishing is present in me. What is my wish? To be like Christ completely.

But in actual practice, I'm not perfectly like Christ, Romans 7. The good that I wish, I do not do. But I practice the very evil that I do not wish. Now, evil, you can have different definitions of it.

Anything un-Christ-like is sin, it's evil in God's eyes. So it's referring to that, it's not talking about me going and doing, murdering somebody or committing adultery, no. It's talking about evil in its highest sense, that means something un-Christ-like.

I don't want to do anything un-Christ-like, but I find, after I've done it, I get light on it. Sometimes I get light on it a year later, that I've been living like this all my life. And even the most spiritual person in the world, the Apostle John, for example, at the age of 95, when he wrote one John, he says, we have sin in us.

He still hadn't become like Christ completely. So that ice cube gets less and less and less and less, but we will be fully like Christ. The ice cube will totally disappear only when Christ comes back.

Until then, this experience of Romans 7, 14 to 25 will be there in the best of believers. So, he says here in Romans chapter 7, verse 21, I find then this principle, that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good. Where is that evil? It's in my flesh.

It's not in my will. My will is set on God's side. My mind is set on God's side, but my flesh has got a lot of un-Christ-like attitudes in it.

I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man. This new covenant law is that I might become like Christ completely. I agree with it a hundred percent, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind.

Here is my mind, the true wholehearted disciple of Jesus. His passion is to be like Christ, to speak like Christ, to behave like Christ. He agrees with the law of God completely.

This is the way God wants man to live. Jesus came and lived on earth to show us how God wants man to live, and I agree with it completely. But, despite my passionate desire, and despite God giving me the ability also within, it's only very slowly that I get light on the un-Christ-likeness in different areas of my life.

The more wholehearted I am, the sooner I will discover those things. If you are not wholehearted, you will never discover those things. God's will is that we progress and discover.

I see this different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin, which is in my members. Now, let me repeat again. He's not speaking about continuously lusting after women, and continuously telling lies, and continuously losing the temper.

No! He's finished with that in Romans 6. He's talking here, one, as I said earlier, about the accidental fall, when you don't want to sin at all, and secondly, about unconscious sin. Both we could see in this passage in Romans 7. So, when he sees that in himself, he feels terrible, and he thinks of himself, saying, Oh, wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? See, selfishness and pride, particularly, are two sins that are very deeply rooted in us, and they're like two huge onions. We looked at the illustration of the ice cube.

We could look at the illustration of an onion. An onion has got many layers, and you do something, and afterwards you discover that there was selfishness in that, and you repent of it, and you peel off one layer of that selfishness, and you got a little light of selfishness in that area, but you haven't finished with it. Because in some other situations, you walk with the Lord, you get more light, another layer of selfishness, which you peel off, and little by little, that onion gets thin.

In the same way with pride, you may do something sincerely, wholeheartedly, want to do it for the glory of God, and at the end of it, you may find a little secret spiritual pride comes up, or a little seeking the honor of men, or seeking to impress men. But you don't see it at the time when you're doing that work, when you're serving the Lord in some way, but afterwards you see it. You say, Oh, wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Jesus Christ will do it, but it's progressive.

You don't get delivered in a moment. Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then on the one hand, I myself with my mind, no doubt what I'm doing.

I want to serve the law of God completely, but on the other, my flesh, till the end of my life, it will serve the law of sin. It will keep on doing unchrist-like things in areas where I don't have light. It's unconscious, and because it's unconscious, I'm not living in conscious sin, Romans 8 1, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because we don't walk according to the flesh, but we walk according to the Spirit.

But even the one who walks according to the Spirit, he's not perfectly like Christ. He's progressively getting more and more and more and more like Christ. This is a wonderful life, so there's no condemnation.

And if we understand Romans 7, 14 to 25 right, we will not condemn ourselves for that occasional trip up when we fell when we didn't want to, or because of unconscious sin that we discover progressively, but we press on to become more and more like Jesus Christ. Amen.

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