

Undeclared by the Law of Sin

Romans 8:1-10 (CSB)

¹ Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus, ² because the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law could not do since it was weakened by the flesh, God did. He condemned sin in the flesh by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh as a sin offering, ⁴ in order that the law's requirement would be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵ For those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit have their minds set on the things of the Spirit. ⁶ Now the mindset of the flesh is death, but the mindset of the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ The mindset of the flesh is hostile to God because it does not submit to God's law. Indeed, it is unable to do so. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ⁹ You, however, are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him. ¹⁰ Now if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit gives life because of righteousness.

The most common word describing sin has the idea of missing the mark. Sin is not just consciously, willfully doing something evil. Sin is failing to hit the bull's eye, failing to execute something perfectly.

We sometimes brush off the concept of sin by saying that no one is perfect. Honestly, though, that's a nicer way of saying, "Everyone sins." But we don't like the word sin. Here's the reality. When I fail to get 100% on my math test, I'm a sinner. When I misspeak a word, I'm a sinner. When I gaze too long at another woman and a brief lustful thought comes in, I'm a sinner. When my thoughts immediately say "no" to the helpful thing my parents want me to do, I'm a sinner. When I worry, I'm a sinner.

We want to rationalize and downplay our sinfulness. I didn't get 100% on the test, but I studied hard and I tried my best. The question was worded weird anyway. I tripped up on that word, but it was a slip of the tongue. Everyone gets tongue-tied from time to time. I may have had that lustful thought enter, but I quickly dismissed it and focused on something else. I didn't act on it. I may have initially resisted doing what my parents told me, but I did end up doing it with minimal complaining. They just didn't ask what else I had going on or what my plans were or even if I was interested in the thing they wanted me to do. As for worrying, can you blame me? Have you seen my life? Have you seen the things that I go through? Have you seen this world? How can you not worry?

It's uncomfortable and harder to actually admit that I am a sinner and that it's evidenced in every single way that I miss the mark. When I start to let it sink in that all these imperfections are sinful, then I kind of want to throw my hands up on the air. I can't be perfect. Why bother trying?! I'm defeated by the pattern of sin in my life, of always missing the mark!

You're not alone. The Apostle Paul wrote in Romans chapter 7 just before our verses today: "For I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh. For the desire to do what is good is with me, but there is no ability to do it. For I do not do the good that I want to do, but I practice the evil that I do not want to do...So I discover this law: When I want to do what is good, evil is present with me. For in my inner self I delight in God's law, but I see a different law in the parts of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and taking me prisoner to the law of sin in the parts of my body." (Romans 7:18-19, 21-23)

This is Paul writing this, an apostle of Jesus Christ, one to whom Jesus appeared after Jesus had ascended into heaven. Paul planted dozens of churches, preached the Gospel to countless people as well as countless generations since he authored at least 13 books in the New Testament of the Bible. He's a holy, righteous dude! Yet he found a law, a pattern, at work in this life. This is the law of sin: evil is always present and wages war in him, a war that he seems to be losing and that his defeat is inevitable.

We see in our lives how the law of sin weakens us. It infects us. It drives me to selfishness, to rationalize away my sin. Honestly, it wants nothing to do with God. It's his enemy. "The mindset of the flesh is hostile to God because it does not submit to God's law. Indeed, it is unable to do so. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God." (verses 7-8) We find it impossible to live the perfect life demanded by God, to hit his bull's eye of perfection. And he doesn't say that it's okay to be imperfect and make mistakes as long we're tired. He also doesn't say, you'll get there one day. He shows us that with each and every imperfection, we are sinners. And so we feel defeated by the law of sin.

But is that the outcome of our war with the law of sin? Paul says: No, you are not defeated by the law, the pattern, of sin. After describing his struggle with sin, Paul triumphantly declares: "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus!" (verse 1) There isn't loss. No, there's victory. You are undefeated by the law of sin!

How can you say that Paul? I mean, I really like that you say that. I want it to be true, but you yourself are losing this war against the law of sin just like I am, aren't you? Paul gives us the reason why we are undefeated by the law of sin: "because the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do since it was weakened by the flesh, God did. He condemned sin in the flesh by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh as a sin offering, in order that the law's requirement would be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." (verses 2-4)

You are not defeated by the law of sin because Christ Jesus has set you free from that law of sin and death. We couldn't keep God's law, no matter how long we had to accomplish it. We continually miss the mark all the time. Imperfections, sins, they abound in our lives too numerous to count. So God stepped in. Jesus presented himself as a sin offering to God.

A sin offering was an Old Testament offering that God commanded. People would take a bull or a lamb and lay their hands on it, symbolizing that this animal was taking on all their sins – both the intentional and the unintentional, the willful disobedience as well as the common mistakes and errors we make. The animal was then slaughtered, and the blood was sprinkled on the people. This symbolized that the blood of this animal, the one to whom their sins were transferred, paid the debt that their sins, their imperfections, incurred. Now, they were reconciled to God. Peace was made by the life of this animal.

As God came in the flesh, he gathered our sins, every single imperfection - no matter how seemingly minor or insignificant - to himself. This is what we're looking forward to during the season of Lent, the emphasis that we are building towards. We know where our 40 day journey ends, and it is with the cross - a gruesome, painful, bloody death. This is where God takes all of our sins and put them on Jesus. Since he was sacrificed for us, we are set free from the law of sin and death. As our sin offering, God condemned Jesus for our sin and paid the debt that we owed so that it is wiped out. That's why there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Like Paul, you see that law, that pattern, of sin in you, a seemingly unstoppable pattern that completely defeats you, but that's not the truth. The Devil is the one who wants you to believe that you are defeated by sin, that there is no hope for you, that you are bound to sin, enslaved by it, that you mess up too much, that you can never be perfect enough. Your sinful mind is always hostile to God. You could never please God. And we certainly can't do any of this by our power or our strength. But that's exactly why Jesus stepped in for us as a sin offering.

Paul, who saw the same law or pattern of sin in his life, also believed that he was undefeated. "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:24-25a) He already had the victory in the midst of his struggles with sin. And this victory was not for him alone. He relates it straight to us. "You, however, are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you... Now if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit gives life because of righteousness." (verses 9,10)

Yes, there is a battle waging inside of each and every single one of us. We see all the losses with every single sin, every imperfection, we commit. But we have the outcome already decided. There is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. (verse 1) We are not in the flesh, but we are in the Spirit. Own who you are. Own what God had made you. He was condemned for you in the flesh as a sin offering for us. He has changed you, freed you from the chains of sin. He has brought you to him. He has covered you with his blood. You are not defeated by the law of sin nor are you destined to lose. In Christ, you stand undefeated because he defeated the law of sin for us. Amen.