

OUR BODIES IN SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION II

Romans 8:1-4

INTRODUCTION

Play Video: *Confessions of a Shop-a-holic* (C:\Users\pnelson311\Videos)

We are talking about spiritual transformation and the role of our physical bodies in spiritual transformation. Just to be clear, let me share this quote from Dallas Willard which defines what we mean by spiritual transformation:

Spiritual transformation into Christlikeness... is the process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it takes on the character of the inner being of Jesus himself. The result is that the "outer" life of the individual increasingly becomes a natural expression of the inner reality of Jesus and of his teachings. Doing what he said and did increasingly becomes a part of who we are.¹

Last week we made three points about our physical bodies that are very important for us to understand and to have fixed in our minds.

The first point we made was that:

#1 Your body is not a bad thing (especially your sexuality).

This is very clear from a simple, straight forward reading of Genesis chapters 1 & 2. Our bodies are not inherently evil. Our physical bodies are not the cause of our problems. Think of it like this: when I would swing and miss the tennis ball, I would blame the tennis racquet. Now, the tennis racquet was involved in the error, but not the cause of it. So also our bodies are involved in rebellion toward God, but the cause of it.

The second point we made was that:

#2 Your body is a good thing; your body is included in Jesus' work of salvation.

Often, the message of Christianity is shriveled down to getting your sins forgiven so that you can go to heaven when you die. But when we read the New Testament it seems that Jesus is offering much, much more than fire insurance. His work of saving us extends to saving us from the affects of sin in our personal lives and our social interactions. Ephesians 2:8-10 tells us:

Ephesians 2:8-10

⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

In Galatians 2:20 the Apostle Paul described his life in terms of his physical body:

Galatians 2:20

²⁰I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live *in the flesh* I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

¹ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002), p. 159.

So, your body is a good thing and it is very much included in what Jesus is saving; he is saving both your soul and your body.

The third point we made in our previous study is that:

#3 Your body is infected by sin and the inclination toward self-centeredness.

This is our problem. We are born alienated from God and as our character is formed, we become focused on our bodies. After learning to control our own bodies it is our inclination to control other bodies and external circumstances to get what we want whether for pleasure or power.

In our self centeredness, we develop habits of thought and action that literally become embedded in the tissues and muscle groups of our bodies. We do things “without thinking”. Many of these automatic actions are good such as the various functions of driving that we do without thinking. On the other hand, many habits of our bodies are not good and work against our good intentions of living for God.

I encouraged you to observe yourself and think about how many things you do physically that are “automatic” both good and bad. What did you observe?

With regard to spiritual transformation, it is very important for us to grasp this truth that sin does quite literally become embedded in the tissues, muscles and organs of our bodies. Some patterns of behaving and reacting are “automatic” such as our shop-a-holic. She has so trained her mind and body that when she feels bored or stressed she heads to the store as an automatic response.

Now, when a shop-a-holic trusts in Christ as her savior, does this tendency just go away? No. It is still embedded in her body. What is she to do? Is there any real hope that she can change?

This is the question the Apostle Paul addresses in Romans chapters six through 8. We all can relate to the frustration we have felt when we have tried to change long standing habits by will power only to eventually fail and slump right back into our old, destructive habits. Listen again to the Apostle Paul’s description of the Christian battling the sin embedded in his physical body:

Romans 7:15-25

¹⁵I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. ¹⁷So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. ¹⁹For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. ²⁰Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

²¹So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. ²²For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, ²³but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. ²⁴Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

The key question is in verse 24:

Who will deliver me from this body of death?

Now, in this context, he is not talking about dying and then receiving a resurrection body. The body of death is the sin-infected body that continues to be controlled by the sin embedded in the body.

To be delivered from this body of death in this context is to be delivered from sin's control over my body.

To be delivered from this body of death in this context is to not only serve the law of God with my mind but to serve the law of God with my body also.

So how do we go about re-forming our bodies in Christlikeness? A major part of the answer is found in Romans 8. We will study Romans 8:1-4.

Romans 8:1

¹There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Romans 1-5 deals with justification salvation, that is, how is it that a sinner can be reconciled to God? The answer is through faith in the blood sacrifice of Jesus. Romans 6-8 deals with sanctification salvation, that is, how is it that a Christian can be conformed to the image of Jesus? The answer is what we are studying now.

So when the Apostle Paul declares that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus I take it to mean, in this context, that

#4 God does not condemn us for experiencing this struggle with embedded sin.

God's assurance does not give us permission to be anything less than earnest in re-forming our bodies in Christlikeness, but it puts us on different footing before God. Jesus invites us into the yoke with the assurance that He is gentle and lowly in heart. Rather than a stern warning and the threat of harsh criticism, God begins with a word of assurance. God knows and understands our struggle with embedded sin and He is "for" us.

Romans 8:2-4

²For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Now I want to read these verses again and provide some definitions for key words in this passage.

Romans 8:2-4

²For the law (governing principle) of the Spirit of life has set you free (released you from) in Christ Jesus from the law (governing principle) of sin and death. ³For God has done what the law (Law of Moses), weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Before Christ, there was only one general in town – sin. Before Christ we had no other option. We were cut off from God and His life. We were self centered and focused on our bodies. We were ruled by sin and driven to satisfy our physical desires without reference to God.

Knowing the Law of God – what God had revealed is right and wrong – didn't make the people who lived before Jesus do the right and avoid the wrong. This is what Paul means when he says that

³...God has done what the law (Law of Moses), weakened by the flesh, could not do.

Knowing the Law of God never enabled anyone to fulfill the righteous requirement of the Law, that is, to be holy, righteous and good. In fact, knowledge of the Law of God actually stirs up sin. The Apostle Paul had already made this point in Romans 7:7-12:

Romans 7:7-12

⁷What then shall 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." ⁸But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law, sin lies dead. ⁹I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. ¹⁰The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. ¹¹For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. ¹²So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

The Law is kind of like being told to not think of pink elephants or that you are not to covet your neighbor's new Lexus. The Law of God actually stirs up sin. So under the New Covenant, God provided the solution. That is what Paul is saying in verse 3:

³For God has done what the law (Law of Moses), weakened by the flesh, could not do.

What has God done that His Law could not do? God made it possible for us to fulfill, that is, to live out the righteous requirement of the law. And He did this through the physical death of Jesus.

³For God has done what the law (Law of Moses), weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

I think what Paul is saying is that God the Father sent Jesus the Son of God into this world to take on a human body and to become fully human. God the Father condemned sin in the flesh when He poured out His angry wrath against humanity's sinful disobedience and rebellion upon His innocent Son. God hasn't excused our sin. God has punished the sin embedded in our bodies by punishing the body of His Son in which no sin was embedded. This gracious act of God has opened the way for our bodies to be transformed into the likeness of His Son. And this is through the presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit.

The moment a person begins relying on Jesus to make them right with God, the condemnation of sin or the punishment of sin, which Jesus suffered is applied to the

person. They are forgiven and reconciled to God. With the barrier of sin removed, the Holy Spirit of God begins living inside the person. This is what the Bible calls the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Now, literally living in the body of the Christian is a new governing principle, a new general. Sin no longer has exclusive control over the Christian. The Christian now has an option that he did not have before; through the indwelling Spirit he is released from the absolute control of sin. Sin's absolute control is broken. I think this is what the Apostle Paul means when he says that

...the law (governing principle) of the Spirit of life has set you free (released you from)... the law (governing principle) of sin and death.

As we close, it seems to me that the message of Romans 8:1-4 is

#5 Because Christ died for you and the Spirit lives in you, your physical life can increasingly become a natural expression of the inner reality of Jesus and His teachings.

CONCLUSION

Three questions I'm asking you to consider this week:

1. Do you believe that your salvation includes the salvation of your body from embedded sin?
2. Do you believe that it is really possible for your physical life to increasingly become a natural expression of the inner reality of Jesus and His teachings?
3. Do you want to be set free from the control of sin in your body to become more like Jesus?