

[Easley:] Sanctification is a conflict, it's a struggle, it's a fight, it's a war; and, the temptation in our spiritual lives is, you know, just keep on going. This sin isn't that big of a deal. It's a life-long conflict.

[Gauger:] Whether you're at home, at work, in the car or truck, welcome to a new week of *PROCLAIM!*, the quarter hour Bible teaching program with Dr. Michael Easley, who also serves as President of Moody Bible Institute, founded in 1886 by Dwight Moody.

Well, we're in a study of Romans here on the broadcast and as Michael begins today's message, he probes in an area that might just find some of us a bit uncomfortable; our motives. Just how pure are our motives and how concerned is God with motives? We're about to find out. Let's join Michael Easley in a message first heard at Emmanuel Bible Church in Northern Virginia.

[Easley:] I've stressed many times that none of us have pure motives. I know people disagree with me and I continue to pray that you see your disagreement as an impure motive. We don't have pure motives. We're diluted if we think we do 'cause our hearts, as teaching going around the country in the past few years about, when you're a new creation in Christ you have a new heart. Yes and no. You can't read Romans 7 unless you re-interpret the lens and see this as a good guide here. Here's an Apostle saying, "I struggle with sin all my life and you will too." Far more consistent theologically and experientially, is it not? We struggle with it all of our lives. And, Paul is telling us that I'm a wretched person. We are in desperate straits. We are at the bottom and he takes us down, all the way down 'til he says I have this ongoing conflict, I'm a sinner, evil dwells in me, I am wretched man. And, you know what, the ground at the base of the cross is level. It is level. All can come because we're all in the same wretched, desperate strait. That's what Paul is teaching us here.

Well, his burst of depression is followed by a burst of triumph and you ought to underline or highlight it, or put exclamation by it. "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord." He answers the struggle. Who's going to deliver me from this undeliverable position? Who's going to rescue me from a helpless conflict? Who's going to save me? Jesus Christ. And, he burst thanks be to God, thanks be God, the depth of his depraved admission to the height of man. Thank you, God. Through Jesus Christ you have helped me and saved me. So then, Verse 25 sums up the dilemma. "So then, my mind serves the law" meaning I know the good and right thing to do intellectually, but my flesh serves sin. That's the conflict I'm going to have to deal with all of my life.

Let's look at five lessons quickly. Number one, even though we are new creations we cannot live this new life in our own strength. We are 100% impotent, incapable of pulling this spiritual life off in the flesh. Jack Elwood pastored here for many years. She used to say, "God is not interested in sanctifying our flesh. He doesn't want us to be better sinners." The goal of sanctification, the goal of this process, is to understand I cannot do it in the flesh. I cannot will myself to sin less. I cannot stop sinning by trying to stop sinning.

Secondly, sanctification is a life-long conflict. And, I chose the word *conflict* here sort of tongue and cheek, but it's probably more true than not. In seminary my professors used to draw a line of sanctification explaining the different models from historical theology of how people are sanctified over time and there was basically this, you know, he trusted Christ on this linear line and then, you were sanctified, I mean, all your life 'til you died, and you were realized into heaven. And, uh, I – they all had variations of a theme of this process and I used to think, you know, they didn't draw my line. My line would have been *drrr*, you know, little blips in it, you know, synesth rhythm here and there, you know. It would not have gone progressively up all my life. It would have had some real sharp declines. Kind of

like the Dow sometimes, you know. Are you getting better and better and better and more like Jesus every day? Ay-yay-ya. That's sort of the model.

Sanctification is a conflict, it's a struggle, it's a fight, it's a war. I think there's health in being sick. You got to know you're ill. Jesus came to help the sick, not those who were well, right. One of my friends in the audience came up after the first service, psychologist, and he said, "You know, Michael, when I talk to my clients I talked about warning lights on a dashboard. They're there for a reason." He said, "If you ignore those warning lamps, what's going to happen? You're going to be buying an engine." That oil comes on or that temperature gauge comes on. You do well to stop and address that problem, right? And, the temptation in our spiritual lives is, you know, just keep on going. This sin isn't that big of a deal. It's a life-long conflict.

Thirdly, a bland recognition of our sinfulness is an immature and dangerous mindset. If we look at our sins sort of passé, sort of bland, sort of like a white collar crime, no big deal; it's not as bad as murder and rape and robbery, and exhortation, and high crimes of treason. No. It's just a little sin. It's a small sin. And, these become socially acceptable within the Body of Christ. A number of years ago I had a good friend in his late 40s and they had an "oops" pregnancy. Their kids were grown and gone. They got this "oops" complication. We went to lunch and he told me about it. He's a good friend of mine. And, he said we're going to have an amniocentesis done. And, I said, "Why?" And, he got kind of wretched up and he said, "Well, you know, when you're over 40 the high risk of pregnancy and he spouted off this data." And, I said, "Same question, why?" I said, "What information will the amniocentesis yield you and what will you do with it?" He knew exactly what I was going. He asked the question. And, I said, "This is wrong." He said, "Well, you know, we have other Christian friends." I said, "I don't care if it's socially acceptable. It's wrong. Now, if you're going to do the amniocentesis for, you know, prevention and planning ahead, fine. But you and I know why you're doing it." And, I just called his hand. Now, I don't minimize the struggle or trying to be glib about it. I wish I could introduce you to his grown child today, the fine strapping individual who loves Christ. And, you know, the funny part about that story is that child is the light of his parents' eyes. Well, you know, other people do it. You know, if you feel Paul's pain, you're in a good place. Know your sin is an affront to a Holy God. It's a good place to be.

Fourth, sin is incredibly complicated, but to solution is comprehensive. Some of you know, I came out of life of drugs and licentiousness and stupidity, and all about me, and the world should revolve about me, and, uh, I kind of liked that. When I came to Christ He crushed me. He showed me my detestable nature in His mirror, and I was a humbled teenager, a humbled teenager. And, I go back to that ditch frequently to remind me from where I came. Do you? Do you?

Cindy and I have a, I think is a 25th, is that right, 25th high school reunion coming up. Gosh, she's getting old. And, we'll probably go back to Houston and go to both of our 25th high school reunions. And, one of the reasons I want to go today is because those people knew me when. My mother remains the most surprised person on the planet. By the way, don't give up on your son or daughter. Don't give up on your son or daughter. Don't give up. Don't stop. Last chapter is not written. The solution is comprehensive. Ah, that God could save me implication. He could save anybody just like you.

Last, learn to hate your sin and love your Savior. Learn to hate your sin. Don't toy around with it. Don't play with it. Don't bring it close to your heart and think you won't get burned. Don't dance with it. Learn to hate it and fall in love with your Savior simultaneously. Throw yourself across the bed of your spiritual life and beg God to help you, and He will. Don't forget Romans 8:1, where we're going. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Jesus Christ." You're going to struggle with this all your life, men and women, and struggle with it well; but know that the Holy Spirit is here to help us.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for your incredible kindness in our souls. Help us to frequently revisit the ditch from which we were dug. To know how sinful and broken we were. Help us as we fight the fight. And, thank You for Your Spirit that You've given us based on a promise who will help us. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Gauger:] Michael Easley with an honest prayer there and this whole struggle against sin. You know, Michael, you have acknowledged that is a life-long struggle, but you have in the same breath said, struggle well. That suggests that we're all human.

[Easley:] And, I think we can gain some ground of success. I sort of resist the language of victory over sin, Jon. But I do believe under the control of the Spirit we can exercise self-control. We can resist temptation. We can turn away. And, even in analyzing our motives, why are we doing things? I think this is the spiritual life; this ongoing struggle and process of trying to be more like Christ and less like our sinful self.

[Gauger:] You know, anybody who happened to be taking notes and I do know there are people who do that as they listen to *PROCLAIM!* would have observed your choice of the word *learn*; *learn* to hate your sin and love your Savior. That's a process.

[Easley:] Well, it is and just like learning anything in life it takes exposure, it takes repetition, it takes people coming alongside and helping us to improve. And, there is a certain coddling. Most Christians I have talked to who will, you know, get to that point in the conversation saying I really have wrestled with this particular sin for years; and, let's acknowledge it. It feels good. I like it. It's sensual. It's a power trip. It's a control thing. It's a money thing. And, acknowledgement is important. Okay, I do continue to struggle with this particular sin. So, watch for triggers, watch for what turns our temptation, learn, study your sin. I've often encouraged the students at the Institute; study your sin patterns. Why did you get in this situation? What was it that got your attention here and pulled you away from Christ? Are you hungry, angry, lonely, tired; what is it? And, that to me is learning to hate to sin and then saying okay, how do I learn to love Christ more than that sin that I do coddle?

[Gauger:] But the important thing is that as we struggle we struggle well, right?

[Easley:] Yeah, and that's where the Holy Spirit, I believe, comes in. He is there, He is present, He wants to help us, but we had to take the initiative to be open to learning from Him and His Word.

[Gauger:] And, as a reminder, today's message "Who Will Set Me Free?" is one of 14 available on compact discs at our website in this special Romans collection that we've put together just for you. Check it out at www.proclaim.mbn.org.

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