



Gatorade Isn't Enough *Overcoming Sin*

From the Bible study:

Running the Race
A Look at the Life in Christ from the Book of Romans

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Gatorade isn't Enough

Overcoming Sin

WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH: THE STRUGGLE AGAINST SIN

Today, we're going to look at Romans 7 and 8 ... a lot of material is packed in here that is incredibly relevant for us.

First, Romans 7. Romans 7 takes a look at "When the going gets tough." It's Paul's very personal look at his struggle against sin – a struggle we all share, even after we are redeemed and saved by Jesus.

Paul uses some very strong language when he talks about sin. In verse 5, he says we were "controlled by the sinful nature." In verse 6, he says we had to die to what once "bound" us. Verse 8 says that sin "seized the opportunity" to "produce in me every kind of covetous desire." Verse 11 says that sin "deceived me" and "put me to death." And verse 14 states that Paul was "sold as a slave to sin."

This is very clear ... Paul views sin as a powerful, controlling force in his life, leading him to death.

- ❖ What are some of the views of sin that people have – both inside and outside of the church – today?

- ❖ What does it mean to say that man is totally corrupt apart from salvation through Christ?

- ❖ How would you explain that belief to a non-believer who felt that man was basically good, or at least innocent when born?

You see, this is the foundation for Paul’s understanding of sin: we are responsible for doing evil, and yet (apart from Christ) the evil impulse within us is so strong that it is itself a controlling factor. As someone has said, we sin because we are sinners, and we are sinners because we sin. Both are equally true.

Let’s return for a minutes to a few of the phrases Paul uses to describe the force of sin in his life. Paul states that naturally we are “controlled by the sinful nature.” Look back for a minute to your life before you know Christ:

- ❖ Did you ever feel “controlled” or “enslaved” by sin? How? Why? What happened?

- ❖ Can you give an example of sin “seizing an opportunity” in your life that resulted in you sinning?

- ❖ How did sin “deceive” you?

Unfortunately, the force of sin doesn't disappear when we become Christians. Paul goes on in Romans 7 to apparently describe the continuing struggle he had with sin. (At least, that is one way to interpret these verses.)

He writes in verse 15 and following, "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"

Put briefly, Paul is saying, "I want to follow God, but I keep on sinning! What can I do!?"

❖ When in your life have you experienced this same cry of despair? What happened?

I think we have all felt this way at various times. We love God, we've been saved and redeemed by him, many of our habitual sins have fallen away from us, but we still have some old sins that keep hanging on. Perhaps the desire for gossip ... we just love a good, catty little chat. Perhaps greed ... we hide it under wanting to have more to give to God, but really it's because we want it ourselves. Perhaps lust ... we don't actually have affairs, but we sneak a peak at a porn site on the internet every now and then. Perhaps bitterness ... we just can't give up on that old grudge, so we nurse it every chance we get.

❖ What sins do you struggle with the most?

When we take a good, honest look at ourselves, we see these things. We may try to fight against them and overcome them. Perhaps we've tried for years, and failed more times than we can count. And so eventually, with Paul, we cry out, "What a wretched person I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"

GATORADE ISN'T ENOUGH: THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT

Thank the Lord, Romans 8 follows Romans 7! Because it is in Romans 8 that we find the answer. The phrase usually goes, "When the going gets tough, the tough get going." But that isn't the case here. We aren't tough enough to conquer sin by ourselves. Gatorade isn't enough to overcome this weakness in our souls. The only thing that can get us through and give us the victory is the power of the Spirit.

It's good to remember that in the Greek, the word "power" is "dunamis" ... the same word from which we get "dynamite." So in all we talk about today, I want you to remember that God gives you the power to blow up the strongholds of sin in your life. We're not talking about a wimpy victory here ... God doesn't "get by the skin of his teeth." The end is not in doubt. In fact, Romans 8 talks about nine sticks of dynamite that God gives us to explode the hold of the devil in our lives.

The Power of Truth

The first stick of dynamite we have is the power of the truth. This is where we begin. Romans 8:1-4 reads, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit."

We've already discussed the all-sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice for us in an earlier lesson. I won't repeat it again here. What I do want to focus on, however, is that these words are a creed for us ... a shield to guard us against the fiery darts of the devil.

Part of the power of sin is the power to deceive and the power to wear us down. Sin whispers to us, "You're no good ... you've fallen so many times before ... you can't win ... why bother even trying? You'll only fail again ... God can't love you ... he won't help you – he's probably disgusted by you ... you're just a failure to him ..." But in these verses, we find our answer to these lies:

- I am forgiven in Christ. (verse 1)
- I am free in Christ. (verse 2)
- I am alive in Christ. (verse 4)

These are three strong words ... forgiven, free, alive. Whenever sin rears its ugly head and you feel condemned, state clearly that “I am forgiven in Christ.” When sin tells you that you can’t be good, declare, “I am free in Christ.” When sin whispers that you are a failure, shout, “I am alive in Christ!”

Say it with me:

- *I am forgiven in Christ.*
- *I am free in Christ.*
- *I am alive in Christ.*

❖ Consider the sins you named in the earlier question. How does the fact that you are forgiven, free, and alive in Christ impact your struggle with these sins?

The importance of a creed like this – of memorizing verses like this – is because when Satan is battering us down, we get depressed and worn out. That means our feelings are all jumbled and unreliable. I repeat: our feelings are unreliable. Again and again we forget that, and we think, “God *seems* so far away ... God *can’t* care about me ... God *doesn’t* care about me ... I *can’t* get victory over this ... I *am* a failure ...” and we believe and act on those lies.

The Scripture is there to remind us of the TRUTH. God is near. He *does* care. He *is* love. You *can* have victory. You *can* live an abundant life in him.

In the battle against sin, we have to master our feelings and believe and act on the truth. And that is done through the Scripture. Those aren’t just words you’re saying to pep yourself up – this is the voice of Almighty God, refuting the lies of the devil.

❖ Give an example of a time when the truth of Scripture protected you from sinning.

You might say, "I know all those things, but it doesn't make a difference." You know them, but do you believe them? And don't say you can't believe them ... you can. It's your choice to live in the truth, or to live in a lie.

This hit me very hard when I read the following from the novel *The Last Sin Eater* by Francine Rivers. The conversation takes place between a very frightened young girl, Katrina Anice, and another little girl named Lilybet. Though Katrina doesn't know it, Lilybet is an angel. Lilybet begins:

"The truth has set you free, beloved. Now you must choose to walk in it."

"Easy for you to say, but what of the Kai? Is he going to let us walk anywhere at all now he knows we went against him?"

"Believe on him who saved you, Katrina Anice."

"I want to believe. I do."

"Then believe."

"I try to believe."

"Believe. Set your mind and heart upon Christ and obey the word of the Lord. Stand firm, Katrina Anice. God himself is going to fight for you."

So when sin attacks, believe and stand firm in the power of the Truth. God himself will fight for you.

The Power of Transformation

The second stick of dynamite we have is the power of transformation. Verses 5 and 6 read, "Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace."

We talked about transformation in our discussion on purity of mind. When you set yourself to no longer conforming to the pattern of this world, but to being transformed in the renewing of your mind, you will experience power over sin.

Think about it:

- If you set your mind on chastity, what place will lust have?
- If you set your mind on humility, what place will pride have?
- If you set your mind on generosity, what place will greed have?
- If you set your mind on love, what place will selfishness have?

This is a choice. We can choose what we put into our minds. We can choose what to think about. We can choose what to dwell on.

❖ What are you putting into your mind? What do you choose to think about? To dwell on?

Will transformation be easy? No, not necessarily. But when we give it 100%, the Spirit will carry us the rest of the way. He will make the transformation happen in the very depth of our being, until someday it becomes who we are – because we become like him.

The Power of Obedience

The third stick of dynamite is the power of obedience. This is found in verses 7-9: “the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you.”

We're very big about control in our culture ... namely, that we want to be in control of our lives. Master of our fate. Captain of the ship. But true power comes from handing over that control to God.

Being obedient isn't possible unless we foster three key attitudes in our life: humility, trust, and love.

First, humility. Obedience is about submission. It's about admitting that I don't know what's best for myself.

Second, trust. Once I've admitted that I don't know what's best for myself, the next step is to believe and acknowledge that God does know what's best for me.

Third, love. After I've recognized that God knows what's best for me, I choose to follow his guidance because I love him.

It's interesting to think of obedience as a powerful position. Typically, we think of it in terms of subordination or even as inferiority. Slaves obey. Servants obey. Employees obey. But God says that obedience is the key to victory and power over sin. And that is because we are obeying the one who has a divine strategy for winning – and who has the power to back it up.

Perhaps if we thought of obedience in military terms, it could help. If each soldier did his own thing and what he thought was best, the battlefield would be chaotic. Ammunition would be

spent uselessly. Soldiers would be out-flanked. Dangers that would be apparent from a higher vantage point would be walked into blindly. They would lose their lives and the war.

However, if each soldier in the army obeys his commanding officer, the army will win as long as the commander knows what is best to do and has the firepower to rout the enemy. And that is what our Commander has – knowledge and power. In that context, obedience makes perfect sense if we want to win. Obedience puts us in a position of power over the enemy.

❖ When is obedience difficult for you?

❖ When is obedience easy?

The Power of the Spirit

The fourth stick of dynamite is the power of the Spirit. This is found in verses 12 and 13: “Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation – but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.”

You might think, “Wait, you say I can’t get power over sin until I stop sinning? Isn’t that a circular argument? If I could stop, I would!”

The reason this is not a circular argument is because of that little phrase in verse 13: “by the Spirit.” You can’t do this on your own. You can only do it “by the Spirit.”

You certainly have a part in it ... the Spirit can’t stop you from drinking if you’re always sitting down with a beer in your hand. But if you choose to not buy the beer on your way home, he can strengthen your resolve and then also help you resist the temptation to go out and get some later.

It’s important here to remember that the Spirit is a Person. Not an impersonal “force.” Not an “it.” Not a wispy breeze on the wind. He moved over the face of the waters in the creation. He is described as Wisdom crying in the streets. He brought about the conception of Jesus in Mary’s

womb. He raised Jesus from the dead. The Holy Spirit is a Person, and is a Person with infinite power, just as the Father and the Son are omnipotent. Because he is omnipotent, he can give you the power you need to overcome sin in your life.

- ❖ What word-picture can you use to better understand the Spirit's role and presence in your life?

The Power of Guidance

The fifth stick of dynamite is the power of guidance. Verse 14 says simply, "because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."

One of the powerful things the Spirit does for us is guide us. Think about some of the terms we use ... "Before I knew Christ, I was lost." "Even though I'm a Christian, I still lose my way sometimes." "I don't know how I got into that situation."

Lost. Sin confuses us. It leads us down a path of destruction. It makes us lose our head, and derails our sense of direction. But it doesn't have to be that way when we are in Christ: we don't have to lose our way, because the Spirit is there to guide us. He can keep us from going off the narrow way.

- ❖ How does the Spirit guide us? How do we recognize his voice?

The Power of Adoption

The sixth stick of dynamite is the power of adoption. Verses 15 and 16 read, "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children."

Part of the power of sin is its power to tear down our self-esteem. Sin tells us that we're a nobody. We don't belong. We are alone and there's no one to help us. The power of adoption is the power to stand against each one of those lies.

We are somebody to God ... Jesus didn't die for nobodies. The fact that the eternal, almighty, all-sufficient God loved you enough to die for you proves your worth. And beyond that, we are adopted as sons and daughters of the Most High. He didn't save us and leave us out in the cold. He saved us and adopted us.

That makes us princes and princesses in the Kingdom of God – for Jesus Christ is King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Not only are we each somebody special, but we belong. That's what a family – in its ideal – is all about. It's a place of belonging. It's a place to feel safe and secure, no matter what you've done, or how you've blown it, or what kind of a lousy day you've had. So when Satan tells you that you can't go home again, throw the lie back in his face. You're part of the family of God. You've got a Daddy who loves you and will never turn you away.

And finally, we are not alone. That is also what it means to be part of God's family, adopted as his child. Not only are we somebody special, not only can we run home to God when the cares of the world burden us down, but, in fact, God goes with us out into that world. Your family members go with you. When you were a child, your mom or dad would take you everywhere you wanted to go. They were there to protect you, lead you, guide you, and provide for you. So it is with God: we are his children, and he's never going to let us out of his sight.

❖ What is the best part of being in a family to you?

The Power of Hope

The seventh stick of dynamite is the power of hope. Verse 17 reads, “Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”

Sin eats away at us with the sickness of despair. “You can't overcome this. There's no way out. You're always going to be like this. You're going to live with the consequences of this forever.”

Hope destroys despair. We can press on – and even rejoice – because there is an end. There’s an end to sin and all its power. There’s an end to suffering. There’s an end to all our fallen nature. We are going to share in the glory of God as co-heirs with Christ. And that is a glorious hope.

❖ What are you most looking forward to in heaven?

The Power of Prayer

The eighth stick of dynamite is the power of prayer. Verses 26-27 read, “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.”

If you’re like me, you have often felt that your prayers were faltering and weak at best, totally inadequate to even express the depth of your needs. But these verses aren’t talking about our weak and human prayers. These verses are talking about the Holy Spirit himself interceding for us.

No one knows better how to pray for us. No one knows better what we need. And we can know beyond a shadow of a doubt that God the Father hears and answers the prayers of his own Spirit.

Don’t ask me to explain how the Trinity works here ... I haven’t a clue, but I know it’s true: God himself is interceding for you and me – every day, every hour, every minute. And his prayers are powerful to save us from sin.

❖ What does it mean to you to realize that God himself is interceding on your behalf?

The Power of Love

Last, but certainly not least, the ninth stick of dynamite is the power of love. Verses 35 and following read, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

❖ Have you ever been afraid that something could separate you from God? What was it?

When I sin, I feel very unlovely and unlovable. And sometimes I sin *because* I feel unlovely or unlovable. It’s a nasty cycle that leads to despair and defeat.

But chapter 8 ends with the best news of all: nothing can separate us from the love of God. No matter how bad I’ve been, he loves me. No matter how many times I’ve failed in exactly the same way, he loves me. No matter if I am rebelliously doing my thing, he loves me. How could I fail to love him in return? And because I love him, I will try to make him happy by obeying him.

Nothing can separate us from his love. Your drugs aren’t so big that they can stand between you and the love of God. Your drink can’t. Your anger can’t. Your gossiping can’t. Your addictions can’t. Your lack of self-control can’t. God’s love is bigger and stronger and more enveloping than any of these things.

So when some sin looms large in your eyes and seems to blot out everything else and calls to you with its seductive or condemning voice ... remind yourself: God loves me. And because he loves me, he’ll give me the power to overcome this. I can do it – in him. I don’t have to sin anymore. I am forgiven. I am free. I am alive. I am in Christ and in his love – and nothing can take that away from me, or me away from him.

CONCLUSION

Nine sticks of dynamite. The power of God has been given to us to overcome sin. Truth. Transformation. Obedience. The Spirit. Guidance. Adoption. Hope. Prayer. Love.

There's something that all of these sticks of dynamite have in common: they aren't about what we can do or accomplish on our own. They are all the power of God working in our lives. You can't control sin. You can't beat it on your own. You can't have victory over it by yourself. But God can. And God will. When you do your part, he'll do his part. He's given you the dynamite to blow sin right out of your life. It's up to you to light the fuse.

You've just completed one of the lessons
from the ten-lesson series "Running the Race"!

To learn more about the life in Christ from the book of Romans,
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