

Christ's Precious Promise:

THE BOOK OF ROMANS MADE CLEAR—15

“The Problem of Besetting Sins”



by Desmond Ford

We all suffer from besetting sins. Romans 6 reveals the secret of overcoming sin. Some say the gospel means we are free from the law and therefore free to sin. The gospel says we are free from the law only as a method of salvation.

H

ere's a letter I received from a dear lady a few days ago. I can only share with you a portion.

“I've come to fear that what I thought was faith in

Jesus Christ as my Savior is mere intellectual assent. My torment is I do not see or understand how to change this into a real saving faith.

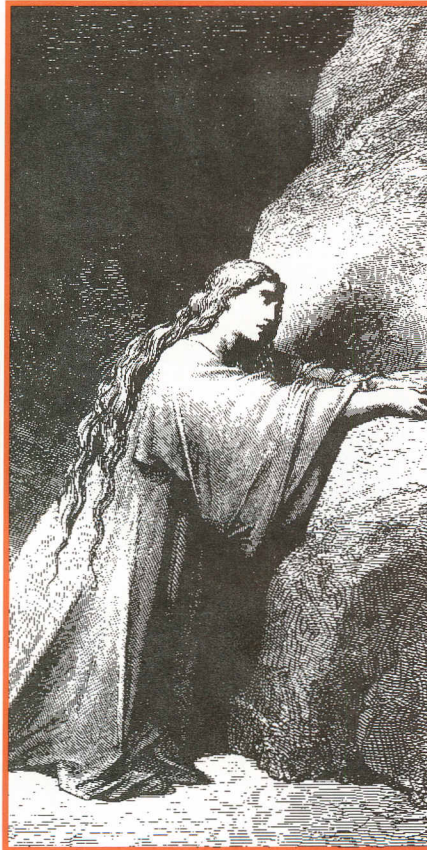
“About a dozen years ago when I was first away from home, I started to see evidence of sinful desires that I could barely control, which seemed to control me more than me containing them.

“This brings me to my question of how to step past my intellectual knowledge that Jesus indeed has died for the sinners of the world and that, by faith, this can be mine. How to step past my intellectual knowledge to the actual saving faith that bids me to give up my rights to myself, calls me to repent, turn away from my sin, to love God more than self, and to choose things that are in the light.

“God cannot choose for me. I must choose for myself to follow him and give up all for him. How does the flesh, the ego, which thrives on self-preservation and survival of itself first put itself to death?

How do I come to a saving faith? Where's the power and will to slay the sinner's flesh? Christ died for sinners, but I assume not for those who will not go and sin no

more, nor repent. I cannot seem to do it on my own. I'm in enslavement to my sinful flesh; yet, God can't choose for me either. I feel doomed in a gray no-man's land.”



Letter and Article

A magnificent letter. Notice the telling sentence, “How does the flesh, the ego, which thrives on self-preservation and survival of itself first put itself to death?”

I've written this dear lady a long letter. At the same time I also wrote an article dealing with the subject. We'll probably print it one day in the magazine.

Besetting Sins

This letter reminds me of other letters I've received with questions about besetting sins. Dear friends, there is not one of us without besetting sins. Not one of us.

By that, I do not mean that we need be in bondage to any sin. A besetting sin is where there's some weakness in your temperament, and you feel temptation a hundred times stronger in that area than in others.

We all have many such weak areas. Many people have no temptation whatever to drink alcohol. (I've never even drunk a cup of tea or a cup of coffee, let alone alcohol.)

There are many people who just have no problems in certain areas, but they're as weak as putty in certain other areas.

That's the way most of us are. We are all lopsided. None

of us are really clearly defined heroes or heroines. It would be nice if we were, but even the best heroes have feet of clay. The truth is we have clay all the way through.

We're not strong at all. The Bible says, "Every man at his best state is altogether vanity" (Psalm 39:5 KJV).

As we go through Romans 6, I think we will find the answer to this issue of besetting sins. We will find an answer to the cry from this lady's letter.

Law Not a Method

We're looking at Romans 6. "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?" (Romans 6:1 RSV).

Do you remember the question Paul asked at the end of chapter three? He asked, "Do we overthrow the law by this faith?" (Romans 3:31). Now the question is repeated in another form: "Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?"

To those who preach and teach, let me say to you that if you are never accused of two things, be absolutely certain you are not preaching or teaching the gospel. These two things are, 'You are making void the law' or 'You are saying that you can sin and get away with it.' If you're never accused of these things, you're not preaching the gospel.

Paul, the greatest preacher of the gospel since Jesus, was accused of teaching, "The law is finished with. You can sin and get away with it." Of course, Paul taught neither. He taught no such thing.

The fact is truth and error often run very close to each other. The truth is that we are not under law as a method of

salvation, though we are under it as a standard.

Nothing can ever change the fact that lying and stealing and impurity and adultery and idolatry are wrong. The cross didn't change that. Those things are forever wrong.

Christians are free from the law as a method because we've all broken it. It's too late to use the law as a method of salvation. You can't put your confidence in something you've smashed to smithereens. It's a broken-back horse. It can't help you onwards.

There Is Forgiveness

As for 'Sin and get away with it,' there's a sense in which we are doing that all the time. But the difference is this: We hate the sin that we know—so to speak—crucifies the Son of God afresh and puts him to open shame. We are never condemned for sins we hate and sins we fight. That's a different attitude altogether to, "Hey, God loves to forgive sins. I love to do them. Let's go. We work well in tandem." That's quite different.

Paul was accused of saying, "We make void the law. You can sin and get away with it." He didn't teach either, but the gospel is so gloriously good and fine, it comes close to **sound-ing** like that. That's because you are not under law as the way of salvation; and there is forgiveness for your sins.

Friends, this is the truth. There is no excuse for sin, but there is forgiveness. It's a hard saying, but it's biblical. There's no excuse for sin, yet there is forgiveness.

But the secret of overcoming besetting sins we have yet to reveal. ❖

