

Paul The Chief Sinner?

Written by admin

Sunday, 28 April 2013 10:39 - Last Updated Sunday, 28 April 2013 11:00

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By Mick Alexander



Many Christians believe that Paul lived his life as a struggling sinner and they use what he said in Romans 7 as an excuse to justify their sin. In Rom. 7:15, 19 Paul said, "... 15what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do 17it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me ... 19what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do - this I keep on doing." These verses seem to say that Paul was continually overcome by his sinful nature. Because of this, some believers say that if the great Apostle Paul sinned all the time then they have no chance of stopping so they continue in sin. In this article, I would like to show that Paul was not a struggling sinner but an example for us all to follow.

God sets Paul as an example for us to follow.

If Paul was a habitual sinner then how could he say, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1)? Then in Phil 4:9 he said, "Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me - put it into practice." These words of Paul's were inspired by the Holy Spirit so God Himself considers Paul to be a Christlike example for us to follow. God would not ask us to follow a struggling sinner therefore the belief that Paul struggled in sin is obviously wrong.

The Holy Spirit rescues us from sin.

The belief that Paul was a struggling sinner comes from not reading the rest of Romans 7 and on into chapter 8. If we read on we find that, through the Holy Spirit, Paul was delivered from his sinful nature. In Rom. 7:24-25 he said, "... Who will rescue me from this body of death? 25Thanks be to God - through Jesus Christ our Lord!" The words "rescue me" can be translated "set me free", "release me" or "deliver me" so Paul is saying that Jesus rescued him

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and set him free from his sinful nature. As we read on, Paul tells us that through the Spirit a person can fully meet the righteous requirements of the law.

Rom. 8:2

, 4 say, "... 2through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death ... 4in 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." From these verses, we can see that after Paul initially spoke of his personal inability to resist his sinful nature, he went on to say that through the Spirit, through God's divine power, he was set free from his "body of death" and was able to fully meet God's righteous requirements. Fully meeting God's righteous requirements certainly does not include habitual sin so it is obvious that Paul did not struggle on as a helpless sinner. Rather, with the Divine help of the Holy Spirit, he overcome sin.

Paul was a very holy man.

Who among us would dare to say, "follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ"? I don't think any of us would say such a thing and this should lead us to realise that Paul was a very holy man. Because the Bible says that we should imitate him, we can be sure that God is not encouraging us to follow a struggling sinner but someone totally transformed by the Spirit. Paul didn't claim to be perfect (Phil. 3:12-14) but he pressed on toward perfection. He was not a weak sinner but a powerful Apostle, full of the Spirit, and God greatly honoured him by declaring him to be an example for us to follow.

We have no excuse for remaining in sin.

As we have seen, Paul was not a struggling sinner but an example for us to follow so he cannot be used as an excuse for our sin. To believers who say, "We are only human after all and can't help sinning", the question is, "What sin do you have that is too big for God to handle?" or "What sin do you have that is too big for Jesus to bear?" There is no doubt that in our own strength we cannot stop sinning but God's promise is that through His Divine power we can live a godly life and "escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires" (2 Pet. 1:3-4).

God sends the Holy Spirit into our life so that we may become new creations, spiritually born again into new life.

Titus 3:5

tells us that "He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit" and Gal. 5:16

gives us a promise: "live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature".

The wages of sin is death, so we should not make excuses for our sin but rather submit ourselves to God because He "chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth" (2 Thess. 2:13).

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