

“I Do What I Hate”

Romans 7:15-25a

6 July 2008

The Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor

[Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church](#)

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I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin.

Prayer.

It would be very easy
For the casual reader of our text
To be led to believe
That the apostle Paul is on the verge
Of making some very important confession;
Adultery, theft, or murder even.
But we would be mistaken.
We all know the story of Paul’s background:
Saul,
His excess,
Persecution of Christians,
His Damascus road conversion,
And his evangelistic travels.
So he doesn’t have much to confess.
If we go backwards two chapters in
Romans
We find Paul speaking in the voice of Adam
In an attempt to bring meaning
To the universal experience of humanity.

Paul writes of sin,
And he does so with the voice of Adam
Once again.

He writes of sin,
But in our world,
The idea of sin has been so diluted
So watered down
It has all but disappeared.¹
It is easy to observe
That for many sin has been reduced
to bad taste or a mistake
- serving the wrong course at the wrong
time at dinner
or saying something embarrassing in a
crowd.
Sin has been so abstracted or so justified
That pornography is a sin
(which it rightly is),
But adultery has become a bad choice.

¹ For this reflection, I am heavily indebted to Marion L. Soards, Professor of New Testament Studies at Louisville Presbyterian Seminary, in Louisville, KY. His lectionary piece, from which I draw, is found at: http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?lect_date=7/6/2008

God has bigger fish to fry
And He is working through Paul
To get the job done.
Paul's understanding of sin is far greater.
He isn't merely writing of a singular sin,
Or even multiple sins
That can somehow be totaled at the end of
the day
And entered into some sort of ledger or
record.
He is speaking of Sin
- with a capital "S"
as a significant force to be reckoned with.
Sin is the hurricane force storm
set against
humanity and God alike.
Sin destroys relationships with one
another.
And sin destroys our relationship with God.

Unlike the rest of us,
Paul correctly understands the power of
Sin:
It can make us do
Exactly that which we know we shouldn't.
Yes we know better,
But the flesh is willing
But our mind is weak.
Sin destroys everything in its sights.
Sin smashes our life,
Destroys our relationships,
And spits us out with a laugh,
Leaving us for dead.
Sin opposes God.
Sin fights just for the sake of fighting.
Sin wants everything God hates
And loves everything that God despises.

Willpower and conviction
May have a chance with individual acts of
lawless behavior,
But when it comes to Sin with a capital "S"
No amount of will is capable
Of righting the capsized boat
known as the human condition.

The singular sin,
The isolated discretion,
Should be brought before the altar of God
(and when better than communion
Sunday?).
Confessed and repented,
Reparations need to be made,
And forgiveness should be freely and
liberally granted.

But the Sin that Paul is speaking about
Is a category 6 gale.
It will squash us like a bug.
Deliverance from Sin
Is much more than deliverance from a sin.
The solution requires much more than
Righteous living,
Eating your fruits and vegetables,
And supporting the party's conservative
political principles.
Deliverance from Sin
Has to come from outside ourselves.
"Who will rescue me from this body of
death?"
the Apostle Paul rhetorically asks.
"Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ
our Lord!"
Hallelujah!
Paul delivers up the correct answer.
Jesus is the only means of deliverance
From sin and death.

To be fully honest,
This rubs us the wrong way.
We affluent Americans don't like being
dependent
On someone, or something other than
ourselves
To make our way through life.
We are self-autonomous!
We are independent!!
We don't need any government help!
And we don't need God's.

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What was that I just said?
You heard correctly.
Our actions speak louder than words.
And our actions are saying
That we need less and less church.
Our actions are saying that we need
less and less God.
Our actions are saying
“Thanks, but no thanks, Jesus.
I don’t want what you’re selling.”
All I need is a bank account large enough
To make every moment of life
fun and entertaining.
All I need is a 401(k) big enough
So I can sail off into the sunset of
retirement.

The only solution to the human condition of
Sin
- with a capital “S”
the only deliverance
comes directly and solely
from Jesus Christ our Lord.

For a society that takes sin
with such a light-heartedness attitude
it is difficult,
if not nearly impossible,
to recognize the sheer necessity of delivery.
Perhaps like Paul,
Only those who have experienced
real delivery
Can appreciate the true necessity
of delivery
at the saving hand of Jesus Christ.
Perhaps this is why
The public confession
Made in the hymn “Amazing Grace”
Is so endearing:
*“Amazing grace,
how sweet the sound,
that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found;*

*Was blind, but now I see.”*²
Perhaps this is why
The personal testimony
Of a converted believer
Can do more
Than a hundred long-winded sermons.

Dearly beloved,
Swallow some pride
And make your confessions
For your sins
Before this holy table.
Swallow some pride
And confess that the capital “S” sin in our
life
- The sin or our human condition -
Is beyond our ability to harness or control.
Dearly beloved,
Let us follow Paul’s lead
To speak with such a voice
That is lifted up saying:
“Who will rescue me
from this body of death?”
Thanks be to God
through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

“Thanks be to God
through Jesus Christ our Lord!”
He is lifted up.
And by his hand
We are delivered.
Amen.

² Amazing Grace, The United Methodist
Hymnal, No. 378.