

The "Power of Sin" Is Not the Sin Nature

by Bill Gillham

I wrote an article entitled THE POWER OF SIN in our May, 1988 Ministry Letter. In it I pointed out that the word "sin" appears forty-one times in Romans 5-8, forty times as a noun, once as a verb. That is one of the most astounding revelations I have ever received from the Holy Spirit. I believe that most people who read this section of Romans interpret the word SIN as a verb, or if they do see it as a noun, they either interpret it as a single sin which was committed or as their sin nature.

As most of you know by now, GMI teaches that Christians do not battle against themselves, but against the power of sin, an agent of the devil which works through the flesh (old ways) to try to control the soul (personality). When we lose this battle, we "do the thing we do not wish" and fail to "do the thing we wish." We do not "wish" to sin, and yet we sin.

The power of sin is what its name implies, a power to entice you into sin. It dwells in you (Rom. 7:21), yet it is not you any more than a gold tooth that dwells in your mouth is you. Sin's goal is to deceive saints into living to get their needs (though good and godly) met by sinning rather than by using the Matthew 6:33 method; that is, "seeking Christ first."

The power of sin is not your sin nature. Your sin nature is a synonym for old man or old self. That "old you" was crucified in Christ (Rom. 6:6). Before you were saved, it was as normal for your old nature to rebel against God's authority as it is for a fish to swim. However, with salvation the new you hates sin (Rom. 7:15a, 19, 22). That's why the Bible addresses Christians 56 times as "saints" (holy ones) rather than sinners saved by grace like we've erroneously believed. Even the Corinthians, the most carnal church in the epistles, are called "sanctified" and "saints" (1 Cor. 1:2).

Yet the POWER OF SIN is alive and well IN you, saint. It indwells your body (Rom. 7:23). On page 1055 of W. E. Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, Vine states that SIN is, "a governing principle of power" that is "personified" in the following passages. He then lists sixteen verses in which this holds true. The term personified means "represented as a person." The power of sin can represent itself as a personage.

You have heard us teach that the power of sin's key tactic is to personify itself as your sin nature, the old man or the old you who was crucified with Christ. It accomplishes this by sending thoughts into your sound mind, the "mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16), with first person singular pronouns in order to deceive you into believing that the old you has somehow jumped off the cross to "do the very thing you do not wish." Hey, nobody but Jesus can come down from a cross. Let's examine a few of the sixteen verses where Vine says the word HAMARTIA, the Greek noun translated "sin," is personified. "Therefore, do not let SIN reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts" (Rom. 6:12). Since sin is personified, let's call it "Mr. Sin" so we won't confuse it with the verb. Mr. Sin tries to control you, to make you live to satisfy your bodily needs.

"But, thanks be to God that though you were slaves to Mr. Sin, you became obedient FROM THE [new] HEART...and having been freed from Mr. Sin, you became slaves of righteousness" (Rom. 6:17-18). In both instances above, sin is a noun, It doesn't say, "you were freed from sinning (verb)"; rather, it teaches that you have been freed from being controlled by the power of sin, which results in sinning. There's a tremendous difference. The first would be robotical sinless perfection; the second would require a moment by moment appropriation of your freedom from being controlled by Mr. Sin.

"But, if I am doing the very thing I do not wish, I am no longer the one doing it, but Mr. Sin which dwells in me (is somehow doing it)" (Rom. 7:20). This verse can really be a puzzler if you interpret the word "sin" as a verb. But it's a noun, and Vine says it is personified (represented as a person). How is the power of sin involved in your sinning? The same way wind is involved in a windmill, electricity in a light

bulb, water in a hydroelectric generator, or gasoline in an engine. It's a power. If you let it, it will control you and you will sin (verb).

In the same way, Christ is your wind, electricity, water, or gasoline for righteous behavior if you will believe He is and act like He is by faith. He, Himself, is the power in the Christian life. "But, I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of Mr. Sin..." (Rom. 7:23). Mr. Sin, the "personage," wars, fights and seeks to control your mind. But your mind does not want to be controlled by this power, so it fights back. In a war there must be at least two sides represented and they must oppose one another. Otherwise the war would cease. Mr. Sin is on Satan's side, so whose side is your mind on? God's (1 Cor. 2:16). Otherwise the war would cease! You hate to sin, right? You like to get your human needs met (and that's not evil), but you hate to sin in order to accomplish it.

The new man is a good person (saint) in Christ. Read the first eight verses of 1 Corinthians to discern what Paul has to say about the Corinthians' true identity in Christ. He calls them "saints (holy)," "confirmed to the end," "blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus," etc. After reminding them of who they are, he kicks the daylight out of them because they are not acting like who they really are. Can you see what a difference this makes in motivating a Christian as opposed to berating him by constantly telling him what a sorry, no-good sinner he is and how he is going to face an angry God someday? Folks, it's our works which will be judged in the future, not our personhood (2Cor. 5:10) and God is not mad at the saved. He took out all the anger He had against us on Jesus (Isa. 53). We'll either be rewarded or we'll lose what we potentially could have won, but "there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ" (Rom. 8:1).

"The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law" (1Cor. 15:56). The law is the source of Mr. Sin's strength. To couple law with Mr. Sin is like pouring gas on a fire. This personage called sin needs a law to aid it if it is to optimally control you. It "eats, breathes and sleeps" via the Law. "The Law is not made for a righteous man" (1Tim. 1:9). Why? Because you, the righteous man (2Cor. 5:21), don't need it. The lost man does (in order to show him his condition), but you don't. You now "have the laws of God written on [your] heart and mind" (Heb. 10:16). God's ethical, moral law of agape is built into the new creation. You desire to obey God. Choose to let that law control you and you will keep the Commandments.

Jesus summed them up in loving God and others (Mk. 12:30-31). "But encourage one another...lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of Mr. Sin (Heb. 3:13b). In this verse, sin is represented as a personage which can harden you through deception. It's not talking about the deceitfulness of a single sinful act, but of a power called sin which "wars against your mind" (Rom. 7:23).

"You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against Mr. Sin" (Heb. 12:4). This is speaking of Jesus in the garden, not on the cross. He "sweat great drops of blood" as He struggled against this power called "sin" which was trying to coerce Him into rebelling against the Father God. But He won! And He continues to win in and through us if we, too, will learn that we are "dead to Mr. Sin" (Rom. 6:11).

These are some of the verses in which Vine says the word sin is personified. As I have studied the Word, I believe there are additional ones which he does not mention. In any case, it was exciting to discover that a man of Vine's stature as a scholar testifies the power of sin is often personified in the Word. What liberty there is in knowing that the rebellious, evil, hateful thoughts I experience are being presented to my mind, not generated by it. By simply standing on God's Word and thinking, "Nope, I'm dead to you, Mr. Sin. That's not my idea," and then acting "alive to God through Christ," I have victory over the power of sin. Truly, "Mr. Sin shall not be master over you..." (Rom. 6:14a). When you act and therefore live like you are dead to its thoughts and alive to Christ.

*****End of Lesson*****