

Civil War of the Soul

In the Grip of Grace - 9

There is a scene in John Bunyan's, *Pilgrim Progress*, when Christian stops by Interpreter's House but is not allowed to continue his journey until he visits a very dark room where a man sits in an iron cage. The man inside the cage sighs as if his heart will break. Christian says to him, "What art thou?" The man answers, "I am what I was not once." "But what art thou?" asks Christian. "I am now a man of despair, and am shut up in it, as in this iron cage. I cannot get out." This man was once a Christian bound for Celestial City, but now he is hopelessly sunk in the depths of despair.

Isn't it strange that some of the most hopeless people we know are some of the most fervently religious people we know? Isn't it even stranger that the very reason they are hopeless is their religion? There is no prisoner more pitiful than the one who is imprisoned by his own best efforts to please God.

LOOKING BACK:

Do you ever find yourself expressing good intentions but never quite living up to them? Explain.

LOOKING DEEP:

Read Romans 7:7-25

1. *Why can't "putting your mind to it," or just exerting more will-power be enough to live the kind of life that God desires? How does the struggle with sin described in this passage square with the freedom from sin described in chapter 6?*
2. *In what way can one's desire to keep law (as an expression of God's good and perfect will) be a noble thing? In what way can one's desire to be "a better Christian" actually become twisted and perverse?*
3. *In what way is being at your "wits end" (vss 24-25) a vital part of a spiritually healthy life? Notice that this is exactly the same place where Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:3)!*
4. Respond to the following statement: **"When law is central to your faith, you feel like a walking civil war."** *What's the alternative, according to this passage?*
5. *When was the last time you felt like a walking civil war? How should you respond the next time you find yourself in the same situation?*

*PRAYER REQUESTS
AND REFLECTIONS*