

## Free and Filled

by Cadet Olivia Munn

I used to read Romans chapter 7:14-20 to comfort myself. I would pour out my heart to God and tell Him how much I loved Him and how much I wanted to obey Him. Then I would find myself doing the things that I knew I would later need to repent of. It's a painful life you know—earnestly trying to please God, yet constantly falling short.

When I found myself in this pattern I began to look to Romans chapter 7 to feel some encouragement from the Apostle Paul. I would think, "If Paul did the things that he didn't want to do, than this must be normal. It must be normal to want to obey God, but to sin instead." This eased my guilt because I became convinced that disobeying God was a normal part of the Christian life.

If reading that didn't soothe my conscience, then all I needed to do was talk to a few Christian friends. I didn't need to go far to find someone to empathize with. Christians all around me agreed, "we try not to sin, but we keep sinning. It's just something we're going to have to deal with until we die. Sin is just part of having a human nature." After hearing this I would feel much better. My experience was validated, and I felt like a normal Christian.

It wasn't until I was about 19 that I heard a Christian express to me that they did not think my struggle was something I needed to live with. I met someone who actually believed that I could live to please God, and not fail. This person told me that Romans 7 must be taken in context with chapters 6 and 8. They quoted to me the 1940 edition of The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine, which reads,  
*"The sanctified soul has no enemies within, but has a fierce conflict without."*

This did not resonate with me. My experience was quite the opposite; my experience was that I had a massive battle going on inside of me! How could the Handbook of Doctrine say that there is no enemy within us? I felt constantly at war! I viewed myself like this: old, selfish Olivia was always arguing with the new Olivia. Sometimes my new self won, sometimes my old self won. Either way—there was definitely a battle within me.

Have you ever realized just how radical this idea of holiness is? It's shocking. Brengle, Wesley, and many other saints stood by this idea that we can actually be free from sin. Not just forgiven by God, but changed by God. Not just saved from hell, but saved from sin. Our sinful desires not just covered up, but removed. Holiness is much deeper than "trying to be good," it is an internal transformation that explodes outward.

We need to recapture the idea that the sinful nature is not an inherent part of humanity. Humanity has been broken by sin, but it was not created with sin. When we imagine what a complete human is, we should picture Jesus—for He was an example of unbroken humanity. And He promised us that we could share in His life. All believers are able to say along with Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live,

but Christ lives in me,” (Galatians 2:20). Jesus Christ, the perfect unbroken One, can live inside of us. This means that our humanity is healed, restored, transformed.

Have you been fed the lie that you will be a slave to sin until you die? We are born as slaves to sin— but do we forget the good news? Jesus died to set us free. “You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness,” (Romans 6:18). You do not have to spend your life living as I once did: trying to obey God, but failing over and over again. You are free. You are free from slavery to sin—that means that you can choose to sin, or not to sin.

Holiness isn't just the absence of sin; it is the presence of love. Therefore, I am convinced that the best way to cultivate holiness in your life is to spend time with the holy and loving One: God. Allow Him to change your desires, so that you are not constantly at war with yourself. God has so much more for you than a guilty conscience and a life of sin followed by a perfect eternity; He wants you to live paradise even now. You can receive the blessing of a clean heart and realize that you are free from slavery to sin. True holiness is possible, and it is the best life imaginable.