



#6 “What about when there’s a struggle to do the right thing?”

To consider that the normal experience for the Christian person is that there will be times when they fail to live in a way that pleases God (Romans 7:7-25).



Hansie Cronje was a national hero as South Africa's captain until cricket's biggest match-fixing scandal destroyed him¹.

Strong emotions about disgraced South Africa captain Hansie Cronje even 10 years after his death

Hansie Cronje: cricketer, captain, Afrikaaner, leader, hero, **Christian**, wealthy, **cheat, manipulator and psychopath**. All words that have been used in the past week as I have travelled around South Africa.

Cronje of course is also dead, killed in a plane crash 10 years ago this week. ... Despite leading his country, and being at one stage "only second to Mandela in terms of popularity" according to his brother, Cronje allowed himself to be led down a path of corruption and cheating.

Q1. What do you think when you hear someone described as a “Christian” AND a “cheat, manipulator and psychopath”?

• *The common perception is that Christians shouldn't be hypocrites. When a Christian is caught out in wrongdoing, the judgments can be more severe because the pedestal they have fallen from is higher.*

“Romans” is a letter in the latter half of the Bible. It is believed to have been written around 60’s AD, by the Apostle Paul, to the young church in Rome (hence the name). Paul wanted to encourage the church by explaining the “gospel” to them. The key sentence of the letter is this: “I

¹ www.telegraph.co.uk, 29 May 2012

am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes...” [Romans 1:16]²

The word “gospel” just means good news. The good news is to do with salvation – with being saved from God’s anger at humanity. It’s a solution that God himself provides in the sacrifice of his son Jesus (see session 1 on Romans 1:18-32, and session 2 on Romans 3:21-26). It’s a solution that requires trusting God’s promise that Jesus’ death is enough to pay for our wrongdoing (see session 3 on Romans 4:18-25). Two of the benefits of relationship with God are peace and hope (see session 4 on Romans 5:1-11). Jesus’ sacrificial death on behalf of others is a powerful incentive to obey God rather than indulge in wrongdoing (session 5 on Romans 6:1-14).

The ‘law’ is a shorthand way of referring to all the commandments (including the 10 commandments) by which God wanted his people to live by. ‘Sin’ is the Bible’s way of speaking of the wrong-doing of humanity.

Romans 7:7-25

7 What shall we say, then? Is the law sinful? Certainly not! Nevertheless, I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.”³ 8 But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting. For apart from the law, sin was dead. 9 Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. 10 I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. 11 For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. 12 So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.

13 Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! Nevertheless, in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it used what is good to bring about my death, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.

14 We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. 15 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. 16 And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. 17 As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. 18 For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature.⁴ For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

21 So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. 22 For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; 23 but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. 24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? 25 Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!

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³ This is one of the 10 commandments (Deuteronomy 5:21)

⁴ or “my flesh”

So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature⁵ a slave to the law of sin.

If you were a bit confused reading that, then you are not alone! The meaning of this passage has been disputed for hundreds of years. The dispute concerns Paul's experience: is he talking about himself before he became a believer, or as a believer, or as a believer looking back on his time as an unbeliever? The question has been raised because the struggle within himself that he describes is deemed to be unusual in the life of a Christian, let alone for a leader of the church. Without going to the complexities of the arguments on both sides, the position here is that Paul is describing the normal experience of a Christian believer, based on the apparent plain reading of the text (Paul writes in the present tense), and the wider context of chapters 5-8 which describe what it means to be a believer. This dispute is worth noting because it impacts not only how the passage is read, but also how it is applied, as we shall see.



Q2. What does the “keep off the grass” sign have in common with God’s law? (hint: look at verses 7-13)

- *The sign “keep off the grass” identifies right and wrong behaviour. God’s law has the same function in terms of identifying what behaviour pleases God, and what is “sin”.*
- *The very presence of the sign “keep off the grass” can make someone want to walk on the grass, even if they had never thought of doing that before! A Christian person may be aware that a particular behaviour is sinful (like coveting – lusting after what belongs to someone else) because the law tells them its sinful (The 10th Commandment is ‘do not covet’). And precisely because they know coveting is wrong – it suddenly becomes more attractive to do.*
- *If someone obeys the sign “keep off the grass” then presumably it will be good for them at some point (they get the benefit of nice, healthy, green grass – although this might only be to look at!) God’s law is good for a person because God is the creator and knows the best way for us to live (verse 12). The problem is that a Christian person’s sinful nature twists something that was intended for good so that it becomes the catalyst for wrongdoing.*
- *The tussle that someone has to obey the sign “keep off the grass” shows the true state of their heart...the struggle a Christian person has in obeying God’s law shows the true state of their heart.*

Romans 6:7

“...because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.”

⁵ or “in my flesh”

Romans 6:11-12

“In the same way count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal bodies so that you obey its evil desires.”

Romans 6:18

“You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.”

Romans 6:22

“But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God...”

Romans 7:14

“...but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin”.

Q3. Is Paul a slave to sin – or not? (hint: the explanation is in verses 21-23)

- *In Romans 6:1-14 (session 5), people live in either one of two ‘realms’ where something is master. One is where sin is master, the other where God is master.*
- *For those living in the realm where God is master (because they are united to Christ through his death on their behalf), it does not mean that sin is absent. The power of sin, and the penalty of sin has been removed, but not the presence of sin.*
- *So Paul still has a sinful nature, which wars against him, and which can sometimes take him prisoner (verse 23). But this happens to him as someone who lives in the realm of grace, where God is master. Paul can (and should) resist sin reigning in his life – and this is possible, given the realm in which he now lives.*

Q4. What is Paul saying life is like for the Christian person now? (hint: see verses 15-20)

- *Paul is saying that for Christian person, there will be an ongoing struggle to do what they know is right. Their sin and failure should lead them to depend more fully on grace and forgiveness.*

Here’s a partial text of the statement reputedly made by Hansie Cronje, to the South African inquiry into match-fixing allegations⁶:

⁶ <http://www.rediff.com/sports/2000/jun/08cronje.htm>

"I have been a Christian since childhood days when I grew up in the house of two wonderful people, Ewie and San-Marie Cronje. I was reborn after the tragic death of a four-year-old girl on the north coast road to Stanger. I tried to live a Christian life and walk the way the Lord wanted me to walk...

"I would like to apologise to all my family members who stood right behind me through this, especially (his wife) Bertha and all the other Christians who prayed for me.

"It has been a tough weekend but also a great weekend for me in that I now have the opportunity to face myself in the mirror again for the first time since the (1999/2000) Indian tour."

Q5. Based on this passage in Romans, how would Paul account for Cronje's behaviour, do you think?

- *Paul would say that Christians still struggle with sin – they are not perfect.*
- *And if there is no battle with sin, then Paul would probably question whether the person was in fact a believer, since an ongoing struggle with sin is the normal experience of the Christian life.*

If an on-going battle with sin is the normal experience of the Christian life, then is it a battle that the Christian will continually lose? Is there any power to change?...see the next session, for some answers.

Written by Caroline Spencer of City Bible Forum. 2012.

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