

The Christian's Daily Struggle

‡ Frustrated by sin and self (vv.15-20)

‡ Rescued by Christ (vv.21-25)

In the Name of Jesus our great Deliverer, dearly redeemed children of God:

Why does growing up have to be so hard? When you're a little kid, you want to grow up quick so you can do more fun stuff. I remember on the school bus thinking how great it would be to drive a car and not have to sit in class. But then come the teen years when Mom and Dad have to teach you responsibility. You see their sins and weaknesses so clearly, but then grow up to do the same.

Sometimes we forget that we are still *children* of God. We're still growing up in God's school of grace. Becoming a Christian reminds me of a *Far Side* cartoon my son showed me years ago. Some birds were talking to each other as they flew over some cars. Each brand new automobile had a target on the roof. What were the birds saying? You guessed it! "Shall we hit that one? Yeh, let fly!" Satan and the world and our own sinful nature are like a flock of dirty birds dumping on you as soon as you come to faith. Are we having fun yet? Growing up is **The Christian's Daily Struggle...**

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If you can relate to this complaint of the Lord's Apostle Paul, if you understand what he's talking about, then you must be a Christian. Someone who does not believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior won't have a clue. That person's soul is like foggy swamp where nothing grows but muck and mold. When the Holy Spirit uses the Gospel of Jesus Christ to call us out of the darkness into God's wonderful light, you're on the highway to heaven. But there are deep ditches on both sides.

Paul describes **The Christians Daily Struggle**: *"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. 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."*

See the conflict between your old sinful nature and the new nature? Old Adam, hostile to God, versus New Man, loving God and neighbor. Your natural born self always wants to put yourself first, to do what you want, no matter who gets hurt, as long as you like it. But the Holy Spirit created a new person in you at your Baptism. Your New Man truly wants to serve God and your neighbor. This is war!

Recently I was reading a vivid description of **The Christian's Daily Struggle – Frustrated by sin and self** in Dan Deutschlander's latest book, *The Narrow Lutheran Middle, Following the Scriptural Road*.¹ Some of you teenagers just learning to drive may have a better handle on this than experienced drivers. It's hard at first to keep the car in your own lane and not weave back and forth. But what if your car was like my sister's 1960 Rambler with no power steering and loose linkage besides? You'd keep swerving back and forth, always in danger of hitting the ditch on one side or the other.

That's what makes Dan Deutschlander's book so helpful. Along one section of highway are the ditch of doubt on one side and the ditch of presumption on the other. Presumption sounds like this:

¹ Deutschlander, Daniel M. *Op. cit.* (Milwaukee, WI: NPH, 2nd printing 2012). Order: (800) 662-6022.

“God’s going to take care of me anyway, so I can drive as fast as I want.” “...sleep wherever I want.” “...Look at whatever I want.” Presumption takes God’s promises as a license for immorality.

But if you forget God’s promises and drive in anxious fear, you’ll end up in the ditch of doubt. Remember Peter during that storm on Galilee? He and the other disciples thought Jesus was a ghost walking on the water. Bravely Peter asked, “**Lord, if it’s you, tell me to come to you on the water.**” “**Come,**” Jesus said. Peter was fine as long as he kept looking at Jesus. **But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!” Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?”** (Matthew 14:28–31 NIV84) It’s frustrating how quickly we can swerve across the road from presumption to doubt.

If none of this is making sense to you, you may be stuck in another ditch right down the road. From the ditch of carnal security one woman told me: “I’m happy with my life the way it is.” She wanted to go on enjoying God’s blessings without giving thanks or worshiping God. Refusing to humble herself in heart-broken repentance, she was missing the heart-bursting joy of God’s forgiveness.

You can’t drive out yourself. You swerve across to the ditch of despair. It’s one of the devil’s dirtiest tricks to make sin look so inviting, like one more drink with your friends. But then the accident... All your sighs and tears can’t bring back the life lost from your drunk driving. You know God forgives you, but how can you forgive yourself? Now Satan magnifies your sin to make you despair.

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Can you see the blessing in this warning? The Christian waking up in the ditch of despair keeps saying over and over, “If only I could turn back the clock...” God just did. He’s taking us back to that spot in the road where the yellow warning signs are big and bright. Can you see? “Slow Down!” “Look at Christ!” “Keep Jesus in view.” Christ and Christ alone can keep you out of the ditch.

“So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!” Jesus rescues us and keeps us with Him on the highway to heaven.

Jesus knows our steering is out of alignment. He created faith in our hearts by the Gospel and now we want to follow God and bless our neighbor. So move over and let Jesus drive. **There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ.** (8:1) His Word and sacrament are one powerful tow truck to pull you out of the ditches of carnal security / despair; presumption / doubt.

Remember the example of King David. One spring David presumed God’s promises of grace and mercy cleared him to commit adultery and murder. He found out his sinful mind was still **“hostile to God.”** (8:7) For almost a year David hid from God. He nearly despaired in his guilty cover-up. Finally, the Lord sent his pastor, Nathan the prophet, to lead King David to repentance. Back on the road, David confessed his sin, and God forgave him. Though the consequences of David’s sin never left his family, God kindly used each painful experience as a reminder of His forgiving grace. **“Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him.”** (Romans 4:7f; Psalm 32:1f NIV84) God does not count your sins against you. He washed them away in the blood of Christ. He opened your eyes and ears to heed the warning signs. God wants you safe and secure with Him on the highway He built. Christ alone can keep you safely cruising down the middle on this one-lane road. Christ alone will bring you to rest in God’s unending glory – all grown up. Amen.