

Question: Why do I keep making bad choices and having to pay for them? Is there any hope for change in my life?

Because we are human, we often make bad choices, suffer the consequences and continue to make those same choices. You, like others, are apparently a slave to your own sinful nature. In the Bible, the apostle Paul speaks of his own struggle with this sinful nature. He laments that although he has “the desire to do what is good,” he cannot always follow through (Romans 7:18). But, he also tells us that like him we can be set free from this bondage through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 7:25; Galatians 5:1). When we truly give our lives over to Christ, we receive forgiveness of sin and the gift of the Holy Spirit to live in us (Acts 2:38; Ephesians 2:22). This presence of God’s Spirit provides the opportunity and power to make the right choices if we desire to do so.

The apostle also reminds us that even believers in Christ continue to have internal conflict unless they choose to live by the Holy Spirit. He said: “So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want” (Galatians 5:16-17).

On one side of this conflict is the “sinful nature.” The word translated “sinful nature” is literally “flesh.” The apostle uses this word in a special way in his letters to the churches. He defines “the works of the flesh” as attitudes like hatred, jealousy and selfish ambition. Because these come from the mind and not from the body, we should not understand the apostle to be referring to our fleshly bodies as evil.. This is why some Bibles translate this word as “sinful nature.” While we do face death because of the sin of our forefathers, we do not inherit the guilt of their sin (Ezekiel 18). However, the fact that all of us do sin (Rom. 3:23) suggests that we have also inherited an inclination to sin. This inclination to sin is what the apostle is talking about by the “sinful nature.” We are acting under the influence of our own inclination to sin when we make bad choices that lead to acts which are described as those of “the sinful nature.” Paul lists these as “sexual immorality, impurity and

debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like” (Galatians 5:19-21).

On the other side of this spiritual warfare is the Spirit that God has given to all who obey him (Acts 5:32). His Spirit in us enables us to overcome the “sinful nature” and to produce the beautiful “fruit of the Spirit” in our lives: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23). For this to happen, we must put the “sinful nature” to death and bury it so that it can no longer live in our lives (Gal. 5:24; Romans 6:1-7). The power to do this is found in our submission to the leadership of the Spirit (Gal. 5:18).

Although the Bible does not explain exactly how the Spirit of God leads us, we can conclude from what the apostle said that somehow the Spirit plants in our hearts desires that are against the sinful nature and fills us with desires for righteousness and holiness from God (Gal. 5:16-17). This can only happen when we “keep in step with the Spirit” (Gal. 5:25). To do this we need to place ourselves in situations where the Spirit can teach and influence us. These situations may include things like prayer, reading God’s word, meditation and fellowship with Godly people who “spur one another on toward love and good deeds” (Hebrews 10:24). Those who have the Spirit of God to help them have by faith have been baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:26-27). They are no longer slaves to their own “sinful nature” but have the Spirit’s help to make better choices and live a renewed life.

[Send questions or comments to University Church of Christ, 801 N. 12th, Murray, KY 42071 or phone 270-753-1881. This article is reproduced on the web: www.nchrist.org] 2010/11/19