

The Believer's Ongoing Struggle With Sin

(Romans 7:14-25)

Intro: As you will recall, chapters 6, 7, and 8 of Romans describe the process of sanctification in the believer's life. In Christian theology, sanctification is a state of separation unto God; all believers enter into this state when they are born-again of God's Spirit, as a result of placing their faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul argued in Romans 6, that as believers in Jesus Christ, "sin is no longer master over us, for we are no longer under Law but under grace" (6:14). We are to embrace the truth, that as believers in Christ, we have been set free from the ruling power of sin in our daily lives. Paul went on to explain in chapter 7, verses 1-14, that while the Law is holy, righteous and good" (v. 12); the Law was never intended to provide men with holiness. The Law cannot transform our old sinful nature; it can only reveal how utterly sinful our old nature is. **Verse 13 serves as a transition**, and explains that sin, and not the Law is the cause or instrument of death in a person.

In the passage before us this morning, Romans 7:14-25, Paul describes his own personal struggle with sin, and how it dominated his life. He provides two nearly identical snapshots of sin in verses 14-20; which leads to the principle that evil was present in him, the one who wished to do good (vv. 21-24). Paul had come to realize that personal sanctification can never be obtained by self effort. He concludes in verse 25 with thanksgiving to God, for providing deliverance from the ongoing struggle with sin through Jesus Christ our Lord. Yielding to the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, the subject of chapter 8, enables a believer to experience true victory over the indwelling power of sin. Commentator Robert Mounce writes: "Recognition of our inability to live up to our deepest spiritual longings (chapter 7) leads us to cast ourselves upon God's Spirit for power and victory (chapter 8)."

I. Picture Of The Believer's Struggle With Sin (Romans 7:14-20)

Paul provides two nearly identical snapshots of his own personal struggle with indwelling sin. In each one of these snapshots Paul states his condition, his conflict, and the ultimate cause.

A. First snapshot (vv. 14-17)

1. His Condition (v. 14) Paul states his condition in verse 14

14 For we know that the Law is spiritual; but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.

Whereas the Law is spiritual, Paul's states his condition as fleshly or carnal, literally unspiritual. All would agree that the Law is spiritual. Since it had its origin in God, it must of necessity reflect His holy character. In contrast to God's holy Law, Paul describes his present condition as a believer. He says I am fleshly or carnal. He uses present tenses throughout this section. Even though he had been born-again, through faith in Jesus Christ, he remains a carnal man. He describes his daily struggle with indwelling sin, and its insidious effort to control his life. Although Christ had set him free from the controlling power of sin (6), he was still being held in bondage to sin. He describes his ongoing conflict in verses 15-16,

2. His Conflict (vv. 15-16)

15 For that which I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. **16** But if I do the very thing I do not wish to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that it is good.

Paul says, "I don't understand what in the world is going on in my life." "I find that I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate."

If you are here this morning, and you can relate with Paul's struggle against indwelling sin, **I have good news for you**. This proves that you are a born-again child of God. Only believers readily identify with sin, and hate its controlling power over us. We conclude together with Paul, that what I am doing, I don't understand.

Permit me to identify some possible sins that might be cropping up in your, or should I say, our, daily lives. How are you doing with anger? Do you find your temper flaring up with the slightest provocation? Do you struggle with lying, cheating, or greed? Most of us have just filed our 2014 taxes. Did you shave the truth, or increase the amount of deductions

you were actually entitled too claim? We do things like this because we are greedy. “I mean, you can’t blame me for trying to hold on to a little bit more of my hard earned money. “When I think of how our government wastes my tax dollars, I am compelled to hold on to all I can.” Perhaps you struggle with covetousness, the desire to have something you can’t have or afford. It just eats away at you, until you sin by procuring something you didn’t need, or had no right to. We all struggle with issues of self-control. Some men make up their mind that they will no longer be controlled by impure thoughts, and yet they continue to purchase and view pornographic materials.

How are you doing with your New Year’s resolution to loose weight? Are you like the man on a diet who prayed “Lord, if you want me to have a donut, provide me with a parking space.” After his tenth, circle around the block, he praises God for the parking space that finally opened up. Some Christians struggle with gossip, alcohol or drugs, hatred in their heart towards others. The list goes on, and on, and on. Why do we continue to do things that we know are sinful and displeasing to God?

It’s like when a parent asks their little boy, or girl for that matter, “Honey why did you do that?” Regardless of what they have just done, they usually respond with a sad face, and downcast head, “I duno.” They don’t know why they expressly disobeyed what you told them not to do. Paul responded in the same way. “I duno, why I continue to do what I hate.”

Paul’s inability to gain victory over the indwelling power of sin led him to the conclusion or cause in verse 17,

3. Cause (v. 17)

17 So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which indwells me.

Paul came to the conclusion that he was not the one doing it, sinning against God, but sin living in him. He came to recognize that even though he had been set free from the ruling power of sin through faith in Jesus Christ, sin still dominated his life. ***Rabbis in Paul’s day taught that sin was like a visitor who lengthens his stay and finally becomes the master of the house.*** Paul was not trying to escape responsibility for his own sinful actions, but to explain the conflict he found going on within him. He develops this concept further in the next snapshot, in verses 18-20.

B. Second snapshot (vv. 18-20)

1. His condition (v. 18a)

v. 18a For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.

Paul restates his condition, that nothing good dwells in his flesh. Again, he is not referring to his physical flesh or material body, but to the power of indwelling sin that controlled his carnal fleshly nature. He restates the conflict that resulted from his sinful condition in vv. 18b-19)

2. His conflict (vv. 18b-19)

vv. 18b-19 For the wishing [to do good] is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. **19** For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish.

Since coming to faith in Christ, Paul's wish or better desire to do good was present in him, but he was not able to do the good he wished to do. In fact, he found himself practicing the very evil that he wished not to do. Paul had come to recognize that even as a believer he had an indwelling power, a sin nature, that sought to control him.

His conclusion in verse 20, is nearly identical to the one he reached earlier in verse 17,

3. His conclusion (v. 20)

v. 20 But if I am doing the very thing I do not wish, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

Paul had come to the conclusion that since he was doing the very thing he did not wish to do, he was no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwelt in him was exercising control over the members of his body. His desire to do good, to please God, was inevitably overruled by sin's insistence that he do the opposite. If we are honest with ourselves we will admit that this is a problem we all face. Sin's corrupting influence within dominates our thoughts and actions. **This leads Paul to identify sin as a principle of indwelling evil (verses 21-25).**

II. The Principle Of Indwelling Evil (Romans 7:21-25)

A. His condition (v. 21)

v. 21 I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good.

Paul had come to discover through his own personal struggles with sin, the principle that sin is an ever present evil that resided in him, “the one who wished to do good.” He describes his inclination to sin as a principle or law, that evil resided in and controlled him. He describes his ongoing conflict with sin for a third time in verses 22-24,

B. His conflict (vv. 22-24)

22 For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, **23** but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.

While Paul joyful concurred or agreed with the law of God in his inner man, his spiritually renewed conscience, he found a different law in the members of his body, that waged war against his desire to obey Christ. This basic conflict with sin, that we all face as believers, is nowhere better described than in **Galatians 5:17-18**:

17 For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. **18** But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.

No matter how hard Paul tried to do good, to live in obedience to God’s Law, he was prevented by sin that ruled over him. This alien power that waged war in his inner man, the law of sin, made him a prisoner of sin. Warren Wiersbe concludes: “While the inward man may delight in the Law of God, our old man, our sin nature, delights in breaking the Law of God.” As you well know, this conflict with sin will never be resolved until Christ appears, and we seeing Him shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is (1 John 3:2).

C. S. Lewis commenting on the Difficulty of Resisting Temptation says,

“No man knows how bad he is till he has tried very hard to be good. A silly idea is current that good people do not know what temptation means.

This is an obvious lie. Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is. After all, you find out the strength of the German army by fighting it, not by giving in. A man who gives in to temptation after five minutes simply does not know what it would have been like an hour later.

That is why bad people, in one sense, know very little about badness. They have lived a sheltered life by always giving in to sin. We never find out the strength of the evil impulse inside us until we try to fight it.” (C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*).

Paul concludes with a plea for deliverance in verse 24, and praise for God’s deliverance in v. 25

C. His conclusion (vv. 24-25)

1. Paul’s plea for deliverance (v. 24)

24 Wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death?

Paul’s attempts to live a good life, a life that pleased God, were opposed by his old sin nature. His problem was, he was trying to gain the victory in his own strength. He came to realize that he was a captive to his old sin nature, and as such he was a wretched man. Notice that he doesn’t ask *how can I be delivered*, but *Who shall deliver me?* Paul had finally come to realize that his deliverance was going to be through the supernatural work of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, who lives in him. A spiritual work that Paul is going to describe in detail in chapter 8. He gives us a preview in the next verse as he answers his own question, “*Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*”

2. Paul’s praise for God’s deliverance (v. 25)

“Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” verse 25

25a Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Deliverance comes dear brothers and sisters through Jesus Christ our Lord. Our complete deliverance awaits the time, at the Rapture of the Church, when we exit these bodies, and see our Savior face to face. Then we shall be rid of this old sin nature once and for all. The Lord Jesus is going to provide each of us with a new glorified body, like His own glorified body (1 John 3:2).

Paul concludes in the last part of verse 25 that our struggle with sin is going to continue as long as we remain in this flesh.

25b So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.

Paul reminds us that the struggle with our old sin nature will continue. But praise be to God, He has provided us with power through the supernatural work of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, who lives in us. God has provided us with spiritual power to progressively render our old sin nature powerless, right here and now in this life. We can continue to grow in holiness, and live out our days to please God and one another. Our progress in holiness is the subject of chapter 8 to follow.

Conclusion:

What I want for you to see here in this lesson, is that the Apostle Paul had come to the end of himself. That is what we need to do. “Oh wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” Until we come to realize, that in our flesh we are helpless and hopeless, we will never begin to experience the liberating power of the indwelling Holy Spirit! When we come to the place where we agree with God, that He alone can deliver us from the indwelling power of sin, then, and only then, will we begin to experience victory over sin.

Closing prayer: Receive Jesus as your Savior. Surrender your life to Jesus!

Closing song: *More Love, More Power; More of You in My Life*